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"SANCTIFICATION THROUGH THE TRUTH."

A SERMON,

Preached in Belfast,

BY THE REV. JOHN PORTER,

On Sunday, the 25th November, 1849,

AT

THE ANNUAL MEETING

OF

THE BELFAST UNITARIAN SOCIETY

FOR THE

DIFFUSION OF CHRISTIAN KNOWLEDGE.

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SERMON

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SERMON.

John xvii. 19, "*And for their sakes I sanctify myself, that they also might be sanctified through the truth.*"

JUDAISM was a religion of form, and show, and ritual observance. The priest arrayed in gorgeous vestments, stood before the altar, and supplicated Jehovah for his people, through the medium of Incense and Burned Offerings. Everything connected with Jewish worship was dramatic, and eminently calculated through its influence on the senses to affect the minds of an excitable, and but partially civilized people. And, Heathenism presented a striking similarity to Judaism. Its *objects* of worship were, indeed, essentially different, but its *modes* of worship were the same. There were the sacrifices, and libations, burnings of incense, and offerings from the produce of the earth. In short, both systems appealed to the imagination and the senses; and sought through their influence to soften the hearts, or evoke the virtues, of their respective votaries.

The Christian Lawgiver, on the contrary, lays down no forms of worship, and requires no ceremonial offer-

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ings, for he despised such things, but directly addresses himself to the rational spirit of man. Moriah and Gerizim were nothing with him. In his estimation, offerings of Rams, and Bulls, and Oil, and Incense, were as nothing. The heart, and its affections;—the soul and its unawakened powers;—the spiritual man deadened by sin, and bowed down under the double load of priestcraft and superstition;—this was the glorious object he proposed to himself to resuscitate;—and he sought by tho power of *truth*, to arouse his native energies, kindle in his mind the spark from heaven, and accomplish his emancipation. Never did this world of ours behold so great an enemy to superstition and pharisaism, to priests and priestcraft, as Jesus of Nazareth.

The text represents our Lord in circumstances of painful interest. It is the night preceding his execution, and he is offering prayer to Almighty God for his friends, and for his church. Throughout the entire of that prayer, he supplicates for them, no worldly benefits; but only prays, that they might be preserved from sin. "Sanctify them by thy truth: thy word is truth."—"And for their sakes I sanctify myself, that they also might be sanctified through the truth." as if he had said, my religion is truth; sanctify them by its influence. It has kept me holy, let it also keep them holy. And as, for their sakes, I have illustrated its power in my own person, so let them for their brethren's sakes, give evidence of its influence, that men, judging of the system by its fruits, may be induced to respect its advocates; and at length, Sin and

Superstition, the altar and the idol, fall and perish together, before the triumphant progress of true religion.

This paraphrase of the text, will not, I am of opinion, be objected to by any Christian of whatever sect, for he cannot doubt, that the Doctrine of Christ is the truth of God, and that it was revealed to man, in order to sanctify his heart and fit him for an eternal world. Christians may differ, and do differ, about the interpretation of scripture, and the meaning to be attached to certain phrases and passages, but they all agree in this, that the Gospel itself is a revelation from God, and is therefore "truth." And I am farther of opinion, that most persons will acknowledge that the very object of our Lord's manifestation was the holiness of our race: "He came to purify unto himself a peculiar people, zealous of good works"; and he "died, leaving us an example that we should follow his steps."

Yet, while such is the noble object which Christianity contemplates, it must be admitted, that it is not always attended by the proper effects on the part of its professors. Sometimes a faith in its doctrines is found co-existing with a depraved heart and a guilty life. We may have, but "a name to live." We may "hold the truth in unrighteousness," and be Christians in our belief, but nevertheless, in mental bias and general character, be the very opposite of what Christianity requires us to be, and of what Christ was. Scripture affords abundant evidence of this fact. When the apostle asks, "can faith save"? he takes it for grant-

ed, that faith may exist in a mind where it exercises no power of moral government; and when he elsewhere asserts, that "the Devils have faith but tremble," he puts the question beyond dispute. Indeed our Lord's language in the text takes the thing as granted; for why pray that his Disciples might be sanctified by the truth, if by a law of necessity, truth must be followed by sanctification? In this case, they were already sanctified, for their master had told them all things, and his doctrine was received by them. I therefore repeat, that it is possible, nay common, for persons to represent in their lives, the double character of sincere Christians, and unsanctified men,—believers in mind but demons in morals,—graceless children,—wicked parents,—bad members of society,—or whatever besides, may stand opposed to that holiness of life which our Saviour prays his disciples might exhibit.

This I dwell, and insist on, not with the view of confuting the popular doctrine, of the efficacy of Faith alone for Salvation; but with the view of impressing this feeling on your minds, that "the truth" when it does not sanctify the soul, is the condemnation of that soul, and that whenever the advocates of truth fail to superadd to their cause the adornment of a virtuous life, they arm their adversaries with arguments against it, which all their eloquence or genius will combat in vain. It matters not whether you extend the principle to parties, or to nations. Example exercises a mighty influence, and if we have at heart the sanctification of our brethren, we must in the first place endeavour to

sanctify ourselves. As an illustration of my argument, and to prove the influence of Truth when thus recommended, let me draw your attention to the period when our text was uttered, and the circumstances under which it was delivered. Never, surely, was any other religion offered to the world under such apparently unpromising auspices as Christianity. The author and finisher of our faith, was, to quote the language of Isaiah, "a man of sorrows and acquainted with grief;" the inhabitant of a village, whose meanness had become proverbial, and familiar from his infant years, with hardships and with poverty. His own figurative but affecting language presents a striking picture of his life and habits:—"The foxes have holes, and the birds of the air have nests, but the son of man hath not where to lay his head." Needy, and persecuted, but resigned and faithful, he traversed his native land, sowing as he went the good seed, whose growth he lived not, nor expected, to witness; and at last, died a death of infamy, his friends alienated from him by gold, or doubt, or terror, and his claims treated with derision and contempt.

Nor, can we imagine men, less fitted for the office of missionaries, than the twelve apostles; that is, judging of the matter by the common rule—for they possessed not among them all, one single qualification of a popular advocate; being destitute of learning, eloquence, and influence;—but then, their *cause* was divine. And though eloquence was wanting they had truth on their side, and though they possessed no

worldly influence to recommend them, their devoted zeal armed them with power. With fearless perseverance they went forward, preaching what they knew to be the truth. Their simple, virtuous lives;—their resignation;—their self-sacrifice, conciliated the respect of some, the favour of others; and unadorned as their gospel was, and divested of every grace of oratory, yet, did it make its way in spite of opposition. It spread beyond Judea;—passed speedily throughout Egypt, Africa and Asia Minor;—circulated over the classic regions of Greece, nor paused in its victorious career, till the genius of our religion took possession of the Capitol of the Cæsars, and looking abroad from thence, beheld the civilized world, paying homage to its ascendancy!

Then truly did christianity possess an expansive power. We discern the *cause* in its truth, backed by the holy and devoted character of its advocates. The truth was irresistible, preached by men whose lives were a comment upon their doctrine, putting to shame the adversary, and whose heroic courage was not to be moved by the judicial sentence, or the lictor's sword.

Now! contrast with their former condition the existing state of most of those countries, in which the "Word once grew mightily and prevailed." The candle of the Lord is extinguished, and the Koran of Mahomet substituted for the Gospel of Christ. The fanatic Moselm invokes his prophet where the fathers of our church called on the name of Jesus!

Is Christianity recovering its lost ground, and repelling the tide of Idolatry and Mahometanism? I think it is not. I see no evidence of the fact. Among some wild tribes of Southern Africa, and in certain islands of the Pacific ocean, there may have been conversions to the faith: — but the Jews still reject Christianity with unconquerable firmness: — The Mahometans spurn at it with sentiments of contempt, and the very idolators of India and the East, reject it. All are blind to its merits and its claims.

How are we to account for such a wide-spread and deep-rooted aversion to Christianity? Shall we say, it is the offspring of ignorance, or superstition, or a wilful preference for systems which they know to be founded on error? It would be unfair thus to question men's integrity. Why should they prefer falsehood to truth? or why, act differently from those, to whom in the ancient times the faith of Jesus was propounded? We know, that at the first, great multitudes were converted: and we must look for other causes, than passion or prejudice, if we would truly comprehend the reason, of the dislike which so vast a proportion of the human race entertain towards our religion, and the obstinate resistance which they present to our missionaries. To my mind the cause of such resistance is palpable. I discern it, not as existing in the gospel, but in its professed advocates and teachers. For, remark the conduct of which our missionaries are guilty. They go forth ostensibly to preach "Christ and him crucified," and to advocate in oppo-

sition to other systems, the simple religion which Jesus taught. But how do they act? How do they carry out their object? What are the simple doctrines which they propound? Why, Creeds, that are incomprehensible: Doctrines, which they are unable to explain; and which they must acknowledge, scripture nowhere expressly teaches. These incomprehensible creeds, and inexplicable doctrines, they offer to mankind, as the great and only source of hope and happiness. These, they represent, as the very essence of Christianity; and their hearers, naturally enough, yielding credence to assertions coming from such a quarter, and regarding such creeds, as synonymous with christianity, confound both together in their minds, and reject both, at the same time, as irrational, impious, and detestable.

Is it at all probable my brethren, that the Hindoo philosopher will ever prefer the doctrine of the Trinity to the more untenable, but far less mysterious doctrine of his own Triad? or that he will discern it's truth, in its incomprehensibility? — or its sublimity, in its contradictory propositions? Is it probable, he will ever be brought to hail as "glad tidings," the information carried to him from the far West, that long before his birth, and irrespective of his own will and work, an arbitrary decree, had doomed him to eternal misery or eternal joy? Or, that he will believe the Christian's God to be "the wisest and the best of Beings," when he learns that under his moral administration the good, by an imputation of sin, may be accounted evil, and the evil by an Imputation of righ-

teousness be accounted good: — and, that in the judgment hour, those who were pre-eminently wicked on the earth, may nevertheless, appear as children of light, from the righteousness of Christ being placed to their credit? Is it a religion such as this, — a religion at variance with logical argument, and every principle of ordinary justice, that is likely to win favour with the enlightened Jew or the disciple of Mahomet, or even with the Heathen? Why, there is no tenet in the creed of the Idolator, more irrational and incredible, than the doctrine of the Trinity: and there are no views of Providence more unworthy of a good God, than those of absolute predestination and a vicarious atonement! Heathenism bears no very unfavourable comparison with such a system, and both Judaism and Mahometanism furnish us with far more exalted views of God and Providence. To my own mind it is evident, that the bad success of our missionaries is mainly attributable to the contradictory and incredible doctrines they propound; and, that they will never succeed in evangelizing the nations, till they are prepared to submit to them a faith that is at once simple and sublime, rational and holy.

But in treating of this subject, it would be wrong, not to notice *the example* which Christians often exhibit to the professors of other creeds, and I think most of you will agree with me, that *it also* needs reform. True! Christianity inculcates peace and love, and forbearance, and a spirit of universal brotherhood. But then, what bloody wars do not Christians wage?—what cruel tyr-

rany do they not perpetrate? When, in any nation has the religion of Jesus kept back its professors from trampling on the weak, and reducing freemen into vassalage? Are not BANNERS blessed, and SWORDS consecrated by anointed priests,—swords that are destined to shed the life's blood of God's children, and banners that are to float above the tide of war, and wave over the dead and dying! Oh, turn your eyes upon the world's wide map:—look at the countries over which the flood of war and carnage has rolled, and the mighty rivers that have actually run red with slaughter, and the millions of human beings whom christians oppress under a slavery worse than death;—look at these fearful doings of the professed servants of Jesus:—consider them well, both as to their atrocity and the feelings they must engender in the minds of strangers,—and I ask you, do you think it possible for those strangers to disannex Christian faith from Christian practice? No: in every age men's religion has been judged of by its influence over their lives, even as the tree is known by its fruits, and until Christians exhibit a higher moral standard to the world than they have yet done, they may count on certain failure: the crescent will still rise superior to the cross, and even the gods of India be held in honor.

Strange creatures that we are! we offer to the nations a *Spurious Gospel* (for what else are human creeds?) and this offer we make with guilt-stained hands, and then wonder, because they decline the gift, at the mental blindness and deep prejudice of the peo-

ple! For my part I am not surprised at this, nor at another fact which need not be denied, viz.: that Christianity is losing much of its influence, even where it is generally professed, and that a spirit of Infidelity is silently occupying its place. When I consider the state of religion in these countries, I would compare it to some goodly tree sending forth long branches and bearing rich foliage, while the rot had entered into its heart. There is much talk upon the subject, but more hollowness:—exhibition in abundance is there, but very little of the sterling ore. Reform, therefore, is the word: a wide, searching, radical reform, or Christianity not only fails abroad, but perishes at home. Up then, and be doing, ye who would purify the ark of the Lord. Up and sanctify yourselves, ye who would fight the battle of your great leader. For the sake of your brethren, sanctify yourselves in faith and practice,—"that they also may be sanctified through the truth."

Brethren! in taking as *your* rule of faith, and final court of appeal, the Sacred volume alone, you have acted a part that redounds to your honor. It is also to your honor, that in despite of much clamour and hostility, you pursue with steady firmness the path which you judge right. Still you have many things yet to learn, and much to amend.

Admitting, for the sake of argument, that you have attained to a faith which needs but little amendment, I would have you reflect that possibly this faith is not accompanied by a suitable walk and deportment: and, that, while taking some credit to yourselves for hav-

ing in matters of opinion got the start of your brethren of other denominations, they may surpass you in depth of pious feeling and benevolent zeal. Yet unless the truth has had a sanctifying power over us, what doth it profit?

Again, how can we hope for God's blessing on our cause, if we ourselves do not live the faith we advocate? The Saviour sanctified himself for the sake of the disciples, "that they also might be sanctified through the truth:" and we must act as he did, and "let our light so shine before men, that they seeing our good works," may be induced to inquire into the nature and origin of an obscure and contradictory creed, and be brought by so doing to the reasonable and scriptural belief of "One God and Father of all,"—that Great Being whose name is one: who is unrivalled in power, and will suffer no rival in honour and affection. Unless we act thus, our cause cannot be attended by any striking result. We may in some quarters weaken the power of prejudice, or undermine men's faith in reputed Orthodoxy, but this of itself will not spiritualise their minds, and unless we sanctify the heart, while we instruct the understanding, we are doing almost nothing. We have merely pulled down the image from its shrine, but have not set up a better object of reverence. The temple of superstition has fallen, but the temple of holiness has not risen in its stead. Without some good moral result, what benefit is there in any change? Better is any system of religion, if observed, than the most enlightened, if neglected. Better, a thousand times, would it be for

us to worship the works of men's hands, in sincerity, than wander on the earth like a second Cain, without a God to venerate and obey; without a heart to feel the goodness of Heaven, and a soul sanctified by the influence of religion.

Brethren! we are sometimes reproached for our indifference about religion: for our lukewarm zeal: and a neglect of ordinances, such as indicates the want of a devout spirit! Now, what shall we say of this reproach? Would that we could defend our character as successfully as our creed! I am constrained to acknowledge that there is some cause for such an accusation.

Oh! were we to arouse ourselves, and present before the world, not a languid, indifferent spirit, but rather one characterised by flowing charity, fervent piety, and active virtue; with what resistless power might we advocate our cause? How persuasive, then, would be our arguments on its behalf, and how majestic its aspect and its progress? The tongue of Calumny would be hushed: superstition gradually disappear, and every foe be overthrown: "For the Lord God would hold up our right hand, saying unto us fear not, I will help thee, saith the Lord, and thy Redeemer, and the Holy One of Israel."

God grant that we may cease henceforward to merit such a reproach; and that we may give all diligence while earnestly contending for the faith once delivered to the Saints, "to add to that faith virtue; and to virtue knowledge; and to knowledge temperance; and to

temperance patience; and to patience godliness; and to godliness brotherly kindness; and to brotherly kindness charity. For if these things be in us and abound, they make us that we shall neither be barren nor unfruitful in the knowledge of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ."—AMEN.

CHRIST OUR LIFE.

A SERMON,

PREACHED AT THE ANNIVERSARY

OF THE

UNITARIAN SOCIETY

FOR THE

DIFFUSION OF CHRISTIAN KNOWLEDGE,

BELFAST, 29th DECEMBER, 1850.

And published at the request of the Society.

BY HENRY ALEXANDER,

Minister of the First Presbyterian Congregation, Newry.

BELFAST:

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ROSEMARY-STREET.

1851.

SERMON.

When Christ, who is our life, shall appear.—Col. iii. 4.

We have here one of those striking phrases by which the earliest and best disciples of our Lord express the deep emotional feelings with which they regarded Him. Their conception of what Jesus was to them, of the relation in which they stood to Him, was manifestly a very high and peculiar one. These men were not wandering sophists, who, dissatisfied with the garden, with the porch, or with Gamaliel, had chanced at last on one who had instructed them in a philosophy more consistent and comprehensive. They do not speak of Him simply as of one whose disciples they had become, because their reason had pronounced his religion to be true. They are His by a deeper feeling; they are his with a worshipping affection, and with a reverential gratitude; and they love to gather round his name such glowing figures, images, and illustrations, as may faintly tell how far beyond the cold allegiance of an approving judgment towards a wise Teacher, was that devotion of heart and soul they feel towards a loving and beloved Saviour. "They are his, they are not their own." "He is their life." To feel with them in this, we must look on things with their eyes. The Gospel came to a lost and perishing world—lost in the mazes of its own wild wanderings, and perishing in the mire of its own sensuality and corruption. It was not

that Christ came to add the last finish, and fix the topmost ornament, to a fair fabric that human reason and human conscience had already reared. He came to a ruined temple, where not one goodly stone was left upon another. He came to lay anew the foundation, and uprear the walls of a heavenly shrine, where God's spirit might come, as of old, to hold converse with the purified spirit of man. "The whole head is sick, and the whole heart faint." The cup of their iniquity was full—their sins were lying heavy on them with the accumulated weight of many generations that had forgotten God.

The world needed not a little aid, a little light, a few appeals to reason, a little burnishing of conscience; but Salvation, Redemption, Regeneration; not a more spiritual Plato, or a wiser Socrates; but a Christ. Faith in him was the instrumentality by which the great deliverance was to be wrought:—it is so still. There is no other name given; no fresher Messias to these latter days. Christ Jesus is the same yesterday, to-day and for ever. The wants of the soul are the same; and if we would have deliverance from our spiritual fears, redemption from our spiritual bondage, salvation from our spiritual evils; if we are to be lifted up above the selfishness and sin of lives without God, to where we shall be made to feel his living presence; to where we shall with glad and thankful hearts look out upon our destiny, and know that we are God's accepted children, it must still be with us as it was with them, "Christ is our life." How?

Not simply as a name in which a certain system of religious doctrine has found a centre; not simply as a Teacher from whom we have received certain abstract truths and a pure morality; not merely as an example or a pattern held up before our eyes, whereby we are to order our conduct; not merely as the authoritative reveal-

er of God's will to man. He is all these; but what he was more than these to the first disciples, and ought to be to us, is I think well indicated in these words—"*He is our Life.*"

What is Life? What is that subtle essence which pervades our bodies, endowing them with the powers of sensation and voluntary motion, and if not the soul itself, a needful condition of the soul's presence? Nothing so mysterious in all nature; nothing so eludes the eager pursuit of science. It escapes the knife of the anatomist; it glides away from the acutest analysis of the metaphysician. It is not the breath, it is more thin than air; it is not the nerves, it is finer than their finest tracery; it is not the brain, it is more subtle than its most delicate tissues; it is not the blood, it buries and hides itself where the blood circulates, but as a thread. These live but are not life; wanting this the body is but dead matter; its functions and uses can be discharged no longer. Its members deprived of the vital principle that gave them coherence, and coming under laws that were in abeyance in the presence of the higher law of life, are quickly resolved into their native elements. Now what is this mysterious thing which we call life, of the nature of which it appears the wise man knows no more than the fool? What Life is to this wondrous body of ours, that is Christ to our souls; that is he to that religion, which is to save and redeem our souls. This religion consists of parts, just as the body does. The spiritual body, as the material, hath its members; each hath its own high use, each its own noble function. There is the morality of the Gospel, the purest in its requirements, yet tenderest in its charity that ever fell on mortal ears. It is holy, pure, and heavenly. The world has seen, dreamed of nothing, so searching, so all em-

bracing, so unbending in the presence of Pharasaic pride or stubborn impenitence, and yet so gentle and compassionate towards the over-tried, fallen, but repentant sinner. There is that revelation we have of the Infinite God, showing how the awful Jehovah is our loving father; how he who sweeps the ocean with his tempests, breathes gently on the smoking flax of every heavenward desire ; and how, as his child,each man is brother of every other, and heir together with him of the grace of life. There is that holy sacrifice on Calvary, the most acceptable God ever received, and the most powerful in drawing hearts to him. There is that glorious rising from Joseph's tomb, that seals for ever man's noblest hopes. These are the members in particular of Christ's glorious body ; but beautiful and faultless as they are each one, it is not singly but jointly that their full ends are answered. It is Christ himself that is their life. It is he that moulds them into one living body. It is from his pervading spirit, that "the whole fitly joined together and compacted worketh effectually."

Among the causes that have weakene the power of Christianity in the world, is the tendency that has been shown to separate what God hath thus joined. Doctrine has been too apt to say to morality, "I have no need of thee" and morality, to say to Doctrine, "I have no need of thee :" and in this violent rending of his glorious body, the life of Christ has too often expired in the souls of his Disciples.

Of the erroneous tendencies here referred to, the most general one, and that from which the Church of Christ has suffered most, is that which has led men to worship the letter rather than the spirit of God's word. Assuming that within the pages of the Bible, lay the so-

lution of every speculative difficulty that hangs round our moral and spiritual nature, and a full explanation of the whole secret economy of God's providence, they have put to cruellest torture every text, and phrase, and figure, that they might yield the mystic secret that lay within. Moses must be a true Geologist, Joshua a true astronomer, and Paul the expounder of a complete system of celestial metaphysics. The book must be one, though the writers were so many. As for the building and ornament of the Temple were brought gold from Ophir, silver and ivory from Tarshish, cedars from Lebanon, stones from Tyre, and linen from Egypt; so have our dogmatic christians taken a word of fire from the indignant prophet, a calm statement from Jewish History, a burst of rapt devotion from the Psalms, a phrase of shrewdest worldly wisdom from the Proverbs, the exclamation of a disciple's fear and wonder, a Hebrew illustration from Paul, and the fragment of a vision from St. John; and with such like materials, snatched violently away from their own connexion, and brought thus strangely together,—the doctrinal fabric is seen to rise, not in silence, beneath their hands. It is a building which has cost a world of ingenuity. True noble-hearted men have lavished the whole treasures of their intellects on its design and erection. It is not without a certain kind of beauty; it has an internal consistency of parts, and a gloomy but impressive grandeur; but after all it has its foundations in nothing real, its parts have no mutual coherence, and it is only by continual watchfulness that they are kept together.

The attempt to find in the New Testament a systematic theology which shall explain and reconcile all the mysteries of life—the origin of evil, free will and fate, God's power and man's responsibility—carried out, one

must say, to its utmost extent, and perhaps with the greatest possible success in Calvinism—is a failure. Christianity leaves many such dark questions where she found them. Nothing can be less systematic than the teachings of Christ, and no greater injury and injustice can be done them than to claim for them the kind of merit that belongs to science. Their merit is of a far higher order; and to petrify those living concrete utterances of a soul consciously one with God, into the dead abstractions of the theologian's creed, is to divorce the spirit from the body; and instead of the bread of life, provided for hungry souls, is to thrust on us the husks, which have neither pith nor nourishment. Of such nothing could be less affirmed than that they have Christ for their life. They have no life. They have neither its warmth nor its love. They have the sternness and remorselessness of Death. It is not easy to think that even a believer can feel that Christ is the life of the Creed, called Athanasian, or of the Election chapter in that of Westminster. Nay, truth itself, cooled down to this temperature and cast into this form, can never be, whatever other uses are served, the medium of true union with Him, who is himself life and truth.

It is not merely that this excessive worship of doctrine has led to false doctrine, as it must needs do, when it will, at all cost, reduce to system, what by mortal man, even with Gospel aid, is not thus reducible; it is not merely that it has led to authoritative creeds, which have been a cause of strife, a shelter for time serving, and a crown of thorns to many a martyr's brow; but it is that it has tended to make men look for salvation, not in a growing likeness to Christ, but in a right intellectual apprehension of the mysterious relations that subsist between him and God. To understand the meta-

physics of the skies takes precedence of holiness of heart. To fail in this is to fail in everything. God's acceptance is to be distrusted, unless we can see our title to it. We must not call Canaan ours, unless we can show the conveyance set out with legal accuracy. We must not dream of crossing the Jordan, unless we can see how God has not compromised himself by making the waters of his wrath stay themselves to give us passage. A selfish desire of safety procedes a genuine thirst for righteousness, and the fruit of holiness may wait upon a secure possession of the vineyard. We are first safe, and then holy. Of such views Christ does not seem to me the life. He showed no such sensitiveness to mere intellectual error. In some such, without an effort, he allowed his disciples to remain. Could he but establish himself in their hearts as their spiritual Lord, produce his own likeness in the region of the conscience, give them his own spirit of Trust and Duty towards the Great and Good Father, and mirror in their souls the heaven that reposed within his own, it were enough; their salvation was secure, none should ever pluck them out of his hands. They were his and his for ever.—For this end dogmatic statements of abstract truth were neither requisite nor applicable; but a living union of his heart with theirs. "Abide in me and I in you." "Without me ye can do nothing." "I can do all things," says Paul "through Christ that strengthens me." Of course Christianity hath its own doctrines. A religion without doctrine, without positive teaching is an absurdity and impossibility. Right views of God, of men's relation to him and to each other, lie at the root of our peace and fruitfulness. What I mean to convey is this, that doctrine is but one member of the body, having in itself no salvation, and that the true wisdom for indivi-

dual disciples and for churches is to leave many things in the same obscurity Christ left them in, to be content with great diversities of opinion and interpretation, not to be impatient with each other's heresies, nor exclude from fellowship on account of such; but to lend all energies to keep up the living union of the soul with Christ as the God-appointed Lord of conscience and Redeemer of the spiritual and moral nature of man.

The other tendency to which I referred as leading to a view of Christianity which has not directly enough, at least, Christ for its life, is that which makes the morality of the Gospel everything, and doctrine well nigh nothing—which sees in Christ chiefly an example of his morality, written large for us to copy. This tendency is a reaction from the other. As the one depreciated morality until it seemed almost as if a bad man might, if a sound believer, be a good Christian,—so the other dwelt so exclusively on the moral precepts of the Gospel as to make the Saviour a mere teacher of wise sayings, and to leave the impression that the Gospel had done its work with us, when it had made us decent and respectable, sober and steady, orderly and quiet. That this view falls far short of the truth; that the Gospel is to reach greater depths of our souls, and to bring us into nearer relations to God than such a result would indicate, none can for a moment question. If this were all, one is almost inclined to ask, why did he come, why did miracle and wonder attend his path, and how it was that such a view could draw from the apostles such glowing words of thankfulness for the *Redemption*, the *Salvation*, that God in his dear son had given to a lost and perishing world?

Of the morality of the Gospel, we say as we said of doctrine; when taken merely as a collection of maxims

and precepts, it is cold and dead. Dissociated from Christ who is its life, it may indeed attract our admiration and satisfy our judgment; but it is only when we are conscious of the spring it flows from, and its requirements are felt as proceeding directly from his living lips, that it becomes a power of God to salvation, and so influences our hearts as to effect anything worthy the name of Redemption. Some may say, what matters it whether Christ be in your thoughts or not, so that his moral rule of action is? Many disciples are thus; their integrity is firm, their moral conduct is good, and their benevolence is even active; all perhaps ultimately traceable to Christ. But the living bond is not preserved. They do not "abide" in him. The stream flows by its own strength, and wants the vigor of a continued supply. If many such are, indeed, notwithstanding, the excellent of the earth, what would they not be, were Christ consciously living in their hearts! I hold that there is nothing fanciful in this. Who knows not that well nigh the whole power that maxims and examples have over us, depends on the source from which they come to us? Weighty maxims of wisdom and prudence shall lie as dead things in old almanacs, while a thought barely suggested in conversation by one we reverence will sink deep into our hearts, and perhaps permanently influence the whole current of our after lives and feelings. And so it is, I think, that when we are in doubt or hesitancy as to what is right for us to do or to abstain from doing, while the formal question of our reason, as to what morality requires, would often lead us into dangerous discussion and perilous balancing of expediency with right—a simple reference of the conscience to the personal Christ—the simple query, how he in such a case would have us do, brings, (try it if you doubt it,) as with a flash of light into our souls, the guidance and direction that

we so much require. Thus of his morality as of his doctrine is Christ the life.

"Our life is hid with Christ." Not in any doctrines about him, but in himself; not in a dogma, but in a person; not in a dead creed or in a prudent morality, but in a living spirit. "The letter," the hard doctrine or the bare precept, "killeth, but the spirit giveth life." "Now the Lord is that Spirit." "Believe in the Lord Jesus Christ and thou shalt be saved," not in this or that view of his rank and offices, not that he had two natures or one, not that he changed God's mind or that he did not, not that he made out a title for us, or that we are to trust God without a title, not that he paid the debt, or that the debt was forgiven without payment—but believe in the Lord Jesus Christ, in the personal, living, spiritual Christ. "I am the bread of life." "I am the true vine." "As the branch cannot bear fruit of itself except it abide in the vine, no more can ye, except ye abide in me." With all your doctrines and all your moralities ye can do nothing worthy of your discipleship, ye can grow into nothing of heavenly-mindedness unless ye have Him dwelling in your hearts through Faith. "He that hath the Son hath life. He that hath not the Son hath not life." It is by living contact of our Spirits with His; by looking to Him as the appointed fountain from which are to flow streams of hope, strength, consolation, high aspiration and noble endeavour, that we are saved—yes saved—*saved, redeemed* from grossness of crime, selfishness of heart, ungodliness of life—saved therefore from the wrath to come, for on such things assuredly the wrath of God abideth for ever.

In the living personal Christ, then, as distinguished from the merely doctrinal Christ on the one hand, and from the merely moral Christ on the other, we find, I

conceive, that which our faith is to lay hold of—find the waters of life. Above the cloud of words, through the darkness that thickens around the battle of tenets and the clashing of interpretations, from amid the mists that confuse and narrow our intellectual visions and give a false magnitude to doctrinal objects—the living spiritual Christ, uprises, reveals itself to the inward vision, and stands forth as the true object of that Faith which is to save the soul as our *True Life*.

Now this spiritual Christ is confined to no doctrinal Church. There is a remarkable and highly instructive unity in this respect. Amidst endless varieties of opinion as to his nature, dignity, and offices, there has been none as to his life and spirit. It is delightful to recognise amidst these diversities and differences, the same spirit —the same Lord. Everywhere the life of Jesus has left on men's hearts the same pure and stainless image. The sternest Theologian has allowed no necessity of doctrinal adjustment to cast a shadow on its brightness. Whatever was dark or strange, or unbending, or harsh or cruel, he cast back on the awful God that dwelt apart, keeping the Son still in the light of mercy, goodness and love; and while to complete his theory, he did not scruple to represent the Great God in an aspect the most forbidding, he leaves unstained the mind that was in Christ Jesus. Everywhere in all churches, when we penetrate beyond the strange garments in which they have clothed him, we gladly and thankfully recognise the same meek, loving, holy Saviour.

In this unvarying impression, which the *life* of Christ has left on men's minds—they will find, if any where or ever, the point of union, on which the broken members of Christ's body may reunite. And when his disciples shall have been made to drink in more of this one spirit,

they shall then, and not till then, wish even to be one in Christ Jesus.

But more. As this spiritual Christ is to be found in all churches, so it is faith in this and no other that has given Salvation to true hearts in all churches. It is this Christ and no other that is their life. A more doctrinal one never gave it nor can. Many, it is true, have thought themselves saved by a doctrinal Christ, just as many have thought themselves saved by a merely moral Christ. Many have deemed themselves secure on the ground of Christ's merits making up all their own deficiencies, just as others have thought the Gospel had done all that was needful for them, if they so far followed its precepts as to live orderly and reputable lives. But then in neither the one case nor in the other was any work effected in them which comes up to what the Apostles mean by Salvation or Redemption. Wherever this can be affirmed, wherever there are really regenerated hearts—it has been I believe not by such means, but by the spirit that comes from the life and love and cross of Jesus.

The gross, material, harsh theology of the creed is too coarse an instrument for such work. The prudent regard to consequences and enlightened self-love of a somewhat selfish morality appeal to too low a part of our nature to effect it. Our spiritual life can only be awakened by what is spiritual. Spirit must come in contact with spirit. "The Lord is that Spirit." "Christ is our Life."

But a spirit must needs have a body to reside in.—This spiritual Christ must assume to each man's mind a definite form. It cannot remain to us floating in the air. It must become as it were flesh and dwell amongst us. True, there is nothing for it, seeing we cannot agree, but that each church shall give unto this spiritual Christ

whatever body pleases them; that while the spirit is the same the body must vary with each. The doctrinal Christs may and will be various. One will so clothe him with God's attributes as to make Him recede from view until he become absorbed in the Deity ; and amid these essences and subsistences one is ready to cry with Mary, "They have taken away my Lord, I know not where they have laid him." Another will see in Him only an exalted and glorified humanity. Another will rejoice to think he descended as well as ascended, and that there is this added tie between us and the invisible world. But what I urge is this, that whatever doctrinal body we give to the spiritual Christ, it is the spirit and not the body that is "our Life," and that its being so is not altogether and absolutely dependent on the success with which we have given Him in our thoughts the right doctrinal body ; but on the willingness, the heartiness, the thoroughness, with which we have opened our hearts to imbibe the spirit of his life.

Our charge against the doctrinal Christianity around us, is that it hinders man's soul from coming into close contact with the spirit of Christ. That it has heaped up a mass of vain speculations which like a rough scaffolding hide the fair image from our eyes. We would pull down the scaffolding, not for the sake of pulling down, but that the true and living Christ, image of God as he is, might be revealed. And one great value of our Unitarianism lies, I conceive, in this,—not that it gives us the Spiritual Christ in exclusive possession, but in such a doctrinal body as does no violence to the demands of the intellect, harmonises with our instinctive moral and religious feelings, and makes Him the object of our Faith and Love without trenching on the rights or character of God, which we think that of other churches does—and at the same time preserves for us that firm histori-

cal ground in the past, without which our Christ becomes a shadowy form, which common eyes can never see, and even from most favoured vision fades gradually away. For as our Spiritual Christ must have to each a definite body to dwell in, so must there be firm ground of fact for it to stand on. We must not weave in the air our web of sentiment without the intellect sending up from foundations of reality, spiral points of support and strength for it to rest on. Sentiment and religious instincts we must have, but there must be outward realities for them to mould and fashion. The architect must needs have the inward sense of beauty and construction; but unless he have solid materials to work upon, he builds but castles in the air, not homes for living hearts and shelter for human families. So with the spiritual Architect: let him abandon the events and facts of Christ's life, indissolubly intertwined as they are with miracles of mercy and of confirmation, and plant himself on the instincts and inspirations of his own religious nature, taking fragments from the Gospel, as one contribution of many—and he may raise a shrine made beautiful by many a lofty sentiment and many a brilliant imagination, and in which the young, the happy, the aspiring may hang up many a votive gift; but to which the weary and heavy-laden, the sin and sorrow-burthened, the bereaved and the dying will not care to come.

It is in the living Jesus, as he lived and loved in Holy Land, in the praying Jesus, as he kneels in Gethsamene, in the dying Jesus, as he appeals to us from the cross, in the ascended Jesus, as we feel his love embracing us still, that we find the living centre round which the elements of our religious life revolve. God in his great mercy has given us this object for our faith, commanded us to give Him the trust and reverence of our souls,

promised through Him His own holy spirit, sealed to us through Him our hope of mercy and eternal life, taught us to see in Him the medium of blessing still and to behold in Him the future judge and recompenser of men. To Him then let our hearts cling—leave him not in that Jewish Sepulchre, as if the stone was never rolled away; wrap him not in the hard dry cerements of theology, as if that Sermon on the Mount with nature warm around him, was but a sophist's solving of knotty questions: bury him not beneath our decencies and proprieties, as if a book of proverbs was all that we had of Him: but lifting up our hearts and thoughts to a high appreciation of what his religion can do for us, let us hold fast our confidence, and by earnest meditation on his wondrous works and ways, so drink in the spirit of his life, that we shall be drawn away more and more from our poor self-seeking and self-worship, and feel it more and more our happiness and safety to live as he did to duty and to God. *Amen.*

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WHAT IS POPERY?

A SERMON,

PREACHED AT THE ANNIVERSARY

OF THE

UNITARIAN SOCIETY

FOR THE

DIFFUSION OF CHRISTIAN KNOWLEDGE,

BELFAST, 29th DECEMBER, 1850.

And published at the request of the Society

BY HENRY ALEXANDER,

Minister of the First Presbyterian Congregation, Newry.

BELFAST:

SOLD AT THE UNITARIAN TRACT DEPOSITORY,
ROSEMARY-STREET.

1851.

This Sermon was originally preached in the ordinary discharge of pulpit duty to the First Presbyterian Congregation of Newry, by whom the Author was requested to print it. A similar request having been made by the Unitarian Society, at whose Anniversary it was afterwards delivered, it is now published under its auspices.

Some paragraphs which were omitted in delivery on the occasion last mentioned, are now inserted in their proper places.

SERMON.

"And even things without life, giving sound, whether pipe or harp, except they give a distinction in the sounds, how shall it be known what is piped or harped? For if the trumpet give an uncertain sound, who shall prepare himself for the battle?—I. Cor. iv. 7-8

Our age is one of excitement, discovery and revolution. Art and science are ever enlarging their beneficent empire. All Europe has changed once and again as under a magician's wand. The fabled El Dorado has become the common heading of a Bill of Lading. The religious world has shared in the general excitement. There are indications of great restlessness. Men are no longer easily retained within the old land-marks of Church and Sect; but, believing religion to be a reality, mean, please God, to find out what, and of what worth the reality is. The agitation which at the present moment is convulsing the nation is most remarkable in many respects. It has brought to the surface, together with much that is evil, some great questions which must, one day or other, be answered, and which are of an import far above the claims of rival hierarchies, or the jealousies of contending sects.

We have been in the habit of taking for granted, that as in science and social economy all movement is forward, that so it must needs be with religion also; that as art is every day enriching social life with new facilities, and reform ennobling the kingdoms with new liberties, so also the waxing brightness of knowledge, the diffusion of education, and the growing expansion and earnestness of the human mind, are tokens to us, as from God, that our faces are to the east, and that, however slowly to our impatience the full day of light and truth may seem to draw on, yet that it is hastening behind the mountains, and will, in God's good time, arise and bless with its effulgence the destinies of our race.

With this our faith in God's future, we have ever said, with regard to the Roman Catholic church especi-

ally, that however by her mere dead weight, and by the hold which a rule of centuries has given her over the minds and consciences, and still more over the senses and imaginations of men, she might be enabled, for a time, to withstand the spirit of the age, yet that that spirit was too clearly against her for us to doubt the final issue; and, above all, we never dreamed that any having once breathed the free air of Protestantism should ever be content to live in the stifling atmosphere of the infallible church. Nay, we had hoped, that Rome herself had somewhat changed; that she had, as others, learned something of tolerance and moderation from her own sufferings; and was content, so far and as quickly as certain antiquated claims would permit, to accept the conditions of the time.

In opposition to all this, the nation has been startled by clear symptoms of a retrograde movement. The church of Rome has re-asserted all her old pretensions, in a way most offensive; and whether in late events she has made aggression on the spirit of the constitution or not, (that part of the question does not here concern us,) sure I am, that she has sinned against the Spirit of the Gospel; and that in the ostentatious damnatory style she has assumed, in the manner of the thing, if not in the thing itself, she has given just cause for the indignation that has been excited. It is not to be concealed, however, that the real source of all this commotion is not in what Rome has done, but in the fact, that many conversions to Rome have taken place; that more are anticipated; that Romanism has made a lodgment in the heart of the richest and most powerful Protestant Church in the world; that a large portion of her younger clergy are said to be infected; and that whatever it is that keeps them back from open secession from the church of their fathers, it is not a love of their fathers' Protestantism, nor of the principles on which, in the 16th century, a separation from Rome was effected and justified.

This growth of Romanism has not been among the ignorant and poor, liable, you would say, at all times to be imposed upon by high pretensions; but among the nobility and clergy, among the cultivated and learned;

not in hamlets and cottages, but in Colleges and Universities; not among weak enthusiasts only, whose narrow intellects leave them the prey of whatever their excited feelings and cravings for novelty demand; but among men of strong, acute, cultivated minds, who know perfectly well what they are about, have measured, better than we can do, the way that lies before them, and see better than we can whither it leads. Who are they? Brothers of Bishops, and Chaplains of Bishops—Bishops themselves, more than suspected—sons and daughters of the nobility—men of estate and dignity—Professors in Colleges—Rectors, Vicars, Curates, Schoolmasters.

It cannot be denied, that since the Reformation there has been, in the religious world, nothing so strange as this; and most natural it is, that with the enemy at the gate, and the garrison wavering, there should be excitement and alarm within this ancient fortress of the Protestant Faith.

In the conflict that is raging, our position is not such as to call upon us to take any part; our blood is not to be heated by engaging in the strife; our heads may be therefore all the cooler, to note and to observe; and feeling that the whole matter is full of interest and instruction, and one to which our views are applicable, I would ask—what it all means—how it has arisen, and to what it leads?

First—In what aspect does it exhibit the Church of Rome? Certainly, of late, that aspect has not changed for the better. Long time she was amongst us as a church suffering wrong on accouut of her faith, and most of us perhaps, though wide as the poles asunder from her creed, felt sympathy with her on that ground, as we should again in like circumstances. But I must say her bearing is not now what it was then, and late events, —her conduct towards the New Colleges especially—the tone of her religious organs, and her undisguised grasp at spiritual tyranny, free my mind, I confess, from much tenderness, in saying plainly what I think of such a spirit, come from what source it may.

I will say this, brethren, there are no pulpits in

Christendom from which the Roman Catholics might hear with less offence, or with less suspicion of unworthy motives, the expression of opinion, than from those of our church. We have never joined in factious outcry against them. No man has ever had his party-feeling pandered to, nor has an easy popularity been ever sought by falling in with the rampant spirit of political feeling; nay, it is known to you, that rather than prove false to that principle of universal religious freedom, which acknowledges the rights of others as well as claims our own, and knows no difference in that respect between Catholics and Protestants, Jews and Mahometans, we were content to suffer many things—the loss of adherents, the coolness of friends, and the taunts and insinuations and sarcasms of those who wished not well to our Zion. As long as Roman Catholics were deprived of their civil rights, we could not ask for ourselves what we denied to them; but if, having gained equality, they ever aspire to more, and so far as their church shows herself the enemy of education or spiritual liberty, and therefore of human progress, and manifests an intolerant spirit, then as far as our weak voice can be heard, or our small band avail, we shall be found in these respects, her hearty frank opponents.

But, it may be said, these are the principles of that church, and we should not be severe on her for acting and speaking consistently. Is it then only necessary for a church to be *intolerant enough* to escape the censure intolerance deserves? I trow not. Well then, I cannot mistake the meaning and tone of voice in which that church by her accredited organs now speaks. It is a voice with which the student of history is too familiar. He hears this cry of intolerance sounding with sad monotony, like a death knell, through many a century—muffled and subdued for a season, by persecution or expediency, but bursting out again whenever time and opportunity were given. Who so simple as not to discern this spirit in the late denunciation of those new seats of learning, established as they were, with every safeguard against proselytism, with a liberality in principle and expense that indicated the best spirit, and with

the hope and prospect that they would become centres of light and kindly feeling to our unfortunate country ?

Rome loves not light. She has no hearty love for education. She would rather that the nations should abide in darkness for ever, than that her spiritual rule should be endangered by a single ray that has not passed through a medium, wholly coloured with her own dies. She sits here to-day among the nations in the 19th century with all the feelings and aims of the 12th. Within her history she can show good service done to humanity; and noble spirits have been nurtured in her bosom; and she hath many, many sons, who have felt as others the kindly and enlarging influences of an enlightened age, and whose generous and tolerant feelings, it were intolerance to question ; and it may be the leaven that wrought in priest Luther's heart is still working; but they who rule her destinies, who speak with her voice, and that in a tone that silences and makes of no avail all others, are plainly bent as of old on the enslavement of the human mind, and are inspired with the old priestly jealousy of every generous and liberalising tendency. It is a sad conclusion to come to. I should rejoice to be convinced that it is a wrong conclusion. It is a sad reflection to have in one's mind, that such is the spirit of those who rule the consciences and wield the religious influences of the greater portion of Christendom. But so it is. She hath written her character on the nations she has influenced. And in view of all this, that such a Church, at such a time, at a moment when she is maintained in the centre of her power by the scoffing soldiers of France, against the violence of her own children, who have seen and despised her nakedness, should stand up in the light of an English sun, and call on England's children, as if they were savage infidels, to acknowledge, on pain of damnation, *her*, as the only true church of Him who was truth and purity, surpasses, I conceive, one's highest thought of what priestly arrogance is capable of, outdoes the violence of Exeter Hall against herself.

Had all this fanfaronade stood by itself, however, we should say the excitement and indignation it has roused

were misplaced, as much of it is;—a mere beating of the air, and in a very bad spirit too—but as I said it does not; and to that aspect of the matter I now (with the same free speech,) address myself.

The bold tone that Rome has assumed, is not from any fresh strength she feels at her heart, but as is well known from a temporary vigour given to one of her limbs, by the pouring in of fresh blood, drawn by treacherous hands from the heart of her most powerful enemy. It is the disunion of her foes, that has given her this seeming strength. It is the result of an imperfect and inconsistent Protestantism. If we would know how such fruit has grown on such a tree, we must analyse the soil from which it has sprung. If we would know how it is that such a church as that of England, to which, I should be ashamed not to acknowledge, our common christianity owes so much, which has produced so many of the great names living and dead that are the pride and glory of our nature, could, at the same time, have nourished such degenerate sons as it now appears she has done, we must ask History to roll back her scroll, and tell us how she was fashioned at her birth.

It is her misfortune to date her origin as a Reformed Church from the reign of Henry VIII. Henry was no Protestant though he rebelled against Rome. His thought was, for a reason he had, to establish an English Papacy, and be himself the Pope; and so in his reign Roman Catholic and Protestant were burned at the same stake, the one for asserting the Pope's supremacy, the other for denying the Pope's doctrines. The love of Romish dogma and practices, but hatred of Romish rule, survived even in his daughter Elizabeth. Thus there grew up in England during the time which the church was in forming, a strong court and government party, who agreed with Luther in his casting off Romish authority, but condemned his sweeping removal of Romish ceremonies and usages. Despite this court influence, however, a more thorough-going Protestantism gained ground. Noble spirits returned from their exiles on the continent, (where they had come in contact with Luth-

er, Calvin, or their followers,) determined to carry out the Reform in England to the same extent they had witnessed abroad.

"The English reformers," says Macaulay, "were eager go as far as their brethren on the continent. Bishop Hooper who died manfully at Gloucester for his religion, long refused to wear the episcopal vestments. Bishop Ridley, a martyr of still greater renown, pulled down the ancient altars of his Diocese, and ordered the Eucharist to be administered in the middle of Churches, at tables, which the Papists irreverently called oyster-boards. Bishop Jewel pronounced the clerical garb to be a stage dress, a fool's coat, a relic of the Amorites; and promised that he would spare no labour to extirpate such degrading absurdities. Archbishop Grindal long hesitated about accepting a mitre, from a dislike of what he regarded as the mummery of consecration. Bishop Parkhurst uttered a fervent prayer that the Church of England would propose to herself the church of Zurich as the absolute pattern of a christian community. Bishop Ponet was of opinion that the word Bishop should be abandoned to the Papists, and that the chief officers of the Purified Church should be called Superintendants. When it is considered that none of these Prelates belonged to the extreme section of the Protestant party, it cannot be doubted, that if the general sense of English Protestants at that time had been followed, the work of Reform would have been carried on as unsparingly in England as in Scotland.

"But as the government needed the support of the Protestants so the Protestants needed the protection of government. Much was, therefore, given up, on both sides; an union was effected; and the fruit of that union was the Church of England. To this day the constitution, the doctrines, the services of the Church, retain the visible marks of the compromise from which she sprung."—*His. of England Vol,* I. *pages* 51, 52.

Mark those words of the historian. There was "a compromise." That is to say, the Papist party of the court and government, and the really Protestant party (of the people,) being each too powerful to despise the

other, and both hating the Pope's rule, and fearing lest, in their disunion, he might recast his net over both, agreed that neither party should give a constitution to the New Church after its own idea, but that each should contribute its part. The Protestant contribution is to be found chiefly in the Articles and Homilies, the other in the Liturgy and Canons. The Protestant party put in, Right of Private Judgment, Sufficiency of Scripture and Justification by faith; the other put in or retained, Church Authority to interpret Scripture, Divine Right of Episcopacy and Apostolical Succession, a gentle hint of Tradition, Surplices, Consecrations, Baptismal Regeneration, Priestly Absolution in the smallest quantity, and the Athanasian Creed in all its glorious self-contradictions and unmitigated malignity. And so these two discordant elements thus joined together, not of God, but of expediency, one of the gods of this world, have lain uneasily side by side ever since. The people and clergy were called on to receive the result as a whole; but naturally, indeed inevitably, ever since have taken whichever element seemed to them the truth; and so it comes to pass that Evangelical, Calvinist and Arminian, High Church and Low Church, Tractarian and Protestant, have, when accused of departure from their standards, been able to defend themselves and retort the charge. This state of things has not been all evil. It has given considerable practical liberty of opinion. Perhaps if there are to be authoritative creeds they should be of this kind. The difficulty however is, each has to sign the whole. Paley, however, says that they are not articles of belief, but articles of peace, and the Tractarians take them in a non-natural sense.

Certain it is, there never was a church that presented such varying aspects. A school of the truest liberality, and one of the sternest bigotry; weak enthusiasts and men of the purest and loftiest piety; men who value their church as the fountain of their holiest thoughts, and men to whom she is but the great Diana of their political worship. It has always depended on the temper of the times, and the tendencies of a few leading and energetic men, which element has most prevailed. Un-

til lately the Evangelical party was the strongest. From the revolution to the end of the last century, it was Latitudinarian; and the following extract will show that this Tractarianism is no new thing in the church. The time is that of Laud and Hammond, in the reign of Charles I.:—"The founders of the Anglican Church had retained episcopacy as an ancient, a decent and a convenient ecclesiastical polity; but had not declared that form of church government to be of divine institution. But they never denied that a christian community without a bishop might be a pure church. But a new race of divines was now rising in the Church of England. In their view the church might as well be without the doctrine of the Trinity as without apostolic orders; and the church of Rome, with all her corruptions, was nearer primitive purity than reformed churches without them. It was hinted by this rising party, that if the established church had any fault, that fault was extreme simplicity; and that the Reformers had, in the heat of their quarrel with Rome, abolished many ancient ceremonies, which might with advantage have been retained. Days and places were again held in mysterious veneration. Some practices which had long been disused, and which were commonly regarded as superstitious mummeries were revived. Paintings and carvings which had escaped the fury of the first generation of Protestants became the objects of respect, such as to many seemed idolatrous. It was rumoured that the old monastic spirit had reappeared in England; nay, that a minister of the established religion had set up a nunnery in which the psalms were chaunted at midnight by a company of virgins dedicated to God."—vol. i. 78.

And now, years after, we see the same results; and so it will be, so long as these elements, introduced as we have seen, against the Protestant feeling of the time, are retained. That is their business, however, not ours; only that as now that Church is to do battle against the great opponent of Protestantism, we could wish there were "more distinction in the sound;" that she would trust less to the state armour and shield of Saul, and more to the sling and stone of David, to the native

strength there is in those broad principles of Reason, Right of Private Judgment, and sufficiency of Scripture, with which their and our Right Reverend Fathers in God,—Luther, Calvin, Chillingworth, and the rest,—fought the good fight in the olden time.

On this head we cannot but read with alarm and disappointment many of the late Charges and Replies, which I suppose are trumpets of the church calling to the rescue. There is a woeful uncertainty in the blast. They are begging at the door of the Vatican for an acknowledgement of legitimacy; and Rome it seems is guilty of schism, that's all.

The Roman Catholics will plant themselves on their rock of infallibility. There will be no uncertainty in the sound that calls their forces. Are the Protestant champions to do battle with one foot on the firm ground of scripture, and the other on the marsh of tradition? Are reason and the right of private judgment to be enlisted, and then sent to the rear if they come up in a uniform not quite according to the regulations? Are they to cast in their hand-grenade of common sense to explode the mystery of transubstantiation, and cover with a mitre that of consubstantiation? Is it to be accounted an insult to the common sense of men to say that bread is flesh, though there be a true scripture that literally affirms as much, and to be reckoned quite reasonable to affirm, without a true scripture to countenance it, that "three are one?" Is the trumpet to give an uncertain sound, here a free clear note of Protestantism piped from Durham or Norwich, and there a soothing Italian air harped from Exeter or Oxford? Then for a successful issue we shall have to thank neither the leaders, the weapons nor the positions assumed, but the free spirit of the people themselves.

Whatever the present issue, the battle will have to be fought again and again, until a wider field and firmer ground be taken for the contest, as than now likely to be. Let me show you, where as I think that wider field and firmer ground are to be found.

Popery and Protestantism are the antagonists. It is reasonable then to ask what Popery is, and what Pro-

testantism is? What is Popery? Not I would say a Cardinal or Archbishop more or less; not white surplices or altar candles; these are but its drapery and robings. Not Purgatory and Prayers for the Dead, Transubstantiation and Saint-worship, these its utterances of theological opinion. Neither is Protestantism a mere violent protest against Rome. The Tractarians are as loud as any in the cry; and why not? We have seen how Henry VIII. protested against Rome and yet kept his Popery. So did Laud, the Pusey of Charles II's. time, and so just now do they who bear that name. They would restore Romanism but not submit to Rome. They would make the English church an independent papacy; bring back what the Reformers too hastily cast aside; they would acknowledge Rome as a true sister church, and standing side by side with her, as equally a member of what they fondly call the general church catholic, present a united phalanx against the vulgar Protestantism of Presbyterians and Dissenters. But Rome will have none of them; she refuses the alliance, spurns the offer, denies their legitimacy, and hence they join as loud as any in the cry against the pride and arrogance of Rome. But Protestantism, if I understand it right, is not as I said, a mere protest against Rome, (Rome is a fair and ancient city,) but against something coming from Rome; and if that something came from Oxford or London, it would not be the less Popery on that account. It is to be hoped that this agitation will not spend itself against the mere Popery of Rome, or in a mere embittering of the feelings towards the members of that church; but that it will demand that the thing itself from whatever source it comes, be protested against, disowned and cast off.

What then is Popery—its root and life? Ah! it is a root of many fibres. I shall only specify two of them; but cut these and dislodge their grasp from the soil of God's vineyard, and the whole tree will topple to its fall. These two are—1st. Priestly Claims—2nd. Damnatory Creeds.

As to the First.—What is the true position of the Clergy? Are they ministers or priests, servants or mas-

ters? Our theory is simple enough. The minister can do nothing for you, but what you, any of you, might do for him. He speaks with no authority; is the medium of no influence beyond what the truth, spoken in love, and wrought out in his own character, bestows. He seeks to awaken conscience, to excite devotion, to draw to God by pleadings of Christ's love, which have first moved his own soul, and then go out in urgent appeals to win others also. His work is, by such natural means, to bring mens' consciences and God's truth together, and then to draw reverently back, there being nothing more he can do. But the priestly theory is this. The waters of salvation flow, not through the channels of persuasion, but through the church. God has appointed a regular succession of men from the time of the Apostles down to the present time, by whose intervention, and by whose alone, the stream can come in contact with the souls of men. There is a great reservoir, as it were, from which many pipes convey the waters of salvation. These pipes none but priestly hands, (apostolically descended,) can hold; but they holding them, all who come to their services, and no others, can drink so as to make their faith or holiness of life of any avail. It matters not, the personal character of the priest; the hands that hold the pipe may be filthy, or bloody—it matters not—the water within runs pure and cleansing. They who drink receive the germ of life; they who do not, no matter how faithful the ministry under which they sit, or how apparently christian their lives, can never attain unto eternal life. "The sacraments," says Taylor, "are *conduits* of life and immortality to the soul, independent of any appropriation of them by the personal convictions of the recipient, if communicated by those to whose words and acts a peculiar virtue has been imparted by some secret inexplicable influence transmitted from the Apostles." Now the church of Rome claims to have exclusive possession of these conduits. The church of England, by her doctrine of apostolic succession, lays claim, not indeed to exclusive possession, but to the having a branch-pipe in her keeping, and that she as well as Rome can serve the waters of life: and in cleaner vessels too, than her corrupted sister.

The Evangelical party, indeed, and I suppose a large portion of her reasonable laity, would truly disclaim all this as their belief; but I imagine few would deny that there is some countenance for such interpretation.

"Remind your people," says the Bishop of Exeter to his clergy, "that in the church alone is the promise of forgiveness of sins. You have power to declare and pronounce to Christ's people, the absolution and remission of their sins. Whosesoever sins ye remit they are remitted unto them, and whosesoever sins ye retain they are retained. This is the awful authority given to the Apostles, and through their successors to us. This is the awful authority we have received, and that we must never be ashamed nor afraid to tell the people that we have received. Show it to them in the Collects, in the Communion Service, in the Office of the Visitation of the Sick."

"Why," says another, "should we talk so much of an Establishment and so little of an apostolical succession? Why should we not seriously endeavour to impress our people with this plain truth, that by separating themselves from our communion, they separate themselves not only from a decent, orderly, useful society; but from the only church in this realm which has a right to be quite sure that she has the Lord's body to give to the people."

True Protestantism—true Christianity knows nothing of priests, has no work for them to do.

The second stronghold of Rome, that which has so often in times of excitement and earnestness, given her triumphs over Protestantism, that which gives her still grasp over the spiritual fears of men, is the assumption and the unfortunate, the suicidal admission of it by Luther, and since then by the great Protestant churches, that salvation is right opinion, and that error is damnation. That is to say, there are certain views of the mysterious relations of God and Christ, the origin of sin and a host of other matters, which unless a man think rightly of, "he shall, without doubt, perish everlastingly." That I say is Popish ground. Rome's foot stands firm upon it; and it is because Protestant churches persist

in standing on it also, not with the easy dignity of Rome indeed, but with the ungraceful attitude of men ill at ease, and who feel themselves in a wrong and inconsistent position, that they meet their great opponent at such disadvantage. From this principle flow, reaching their climax in Rome, claims to spiritual authority, priestly arrogance, sectarian hatred, and in past times, by a very direct logic, which I need not indicate, the blood that dies the robes of Rome, and stains even the mantle of Protestantism. The assertion that God has made the salvation of the human soul depend on a right apprehension of doctrinal truth, and its corollary that error is damnable, virtually yield the vantage to Rome. The true ground to occupy is the utter denial of any such principle. Denying this, we say to her, we don't care for, we don't heed your infallibility. It is certain that neither we nor you have, in all things, the truth as it is known to God; but what of that? We may be near to God and Christ, and have his salvation for all that. Salvation is quite another matter. So trouble us not with your offered rest from fears we do not feel. Our peace in believing is grounded on what you can neither give nor take away. That is the true answer; but take other ground. Admit to Rome that right opinion is essential to salvation, and let the battle be simply which has not right opinion, and therefore which will be damned, and the victory, in the minds of a certain anxious cast, will in a great majority of cases be with Rome. Not that Rome's opinions are more scriptural, more reasonable, more defensible, than the other; the difference in these respects is all the other way; but that Rome is more confident in her assertions, bolder in her claims, has greater antiquity and more uninterrupted tradition to support her authority, a larger unity to fill the mind and more splendid ceremonial to strike the senses; and as long as this tenter-hook of salvation being right theology, is kept in the writhing flesh of men and women, terrified lest they should miss salvation by being in the wrong church, though Protestant orthodoxy may hold the line for a time, Roman orthodoxy will hold the further end of it, and draw them at last, for mere relief

from the torture of suspense, into her assuring and all embracing arms.

If Christ made a man's salvation depend on his theology, the assumption of Rome, that he established a succession of men who should infallibly teach the true theology is reasonable enough, considering the chances against a man without such aid, being successful in his search. If it is said that such aid is not needed, seeing that we have the infallible scriptures,—Alas! it is of the Scriptures themselves we want the right interpretation. If it is said that no honest man can fail to find the orthodox interpretation of the dogmas on which orthodox churches make salvation to depend, that is an assertion they should know not to be true; for it is as certain as the Gospel itself that on each side of these controverted dogmas, there have been men whose honesty you may as little question as that of the apostles themselves.

We are driven then again as the only firm place for our feet, to the ground on which I have already said the battle with the Rome will be fought at last.

Has God made man's salvation depend on right belief or has he not? If He has not, then the Rock of Rome becomes a sandbank. If He has, then it is highly probable, (so it will ever be successfully urged,) that he has somewhere provided a living voice of authority to interpret and to teach. "Yes and more," I hear the unbeliever say,—"since you both, Catholic and Protestant alike declare that Christianity teaches that man's salvation depends on his theology, since you are not agreed as to what that theology that saves a man is, since I clearly see that Rome's claim to teach infallibly is a vain pretence, and since it is incredible that a good God should have bound up such issues to these theological puzzles, and denied us a clue to solve them, I conclude, on your own showing, that Christianity is false." The Bishop of London says that Infidelity more than Puseyism is increasing in his flock. Yes, say that salvation is right opinion, and you sacrifice Protestantism to Rome on the one hand, and Christianity to Infidelity on the other. We must plant our foot firm on this great truth,

that salvation is not of the head, but of the heart; not of opinion, but of Faith; not of Churches, but is the Free gift of God to all loving souls.

It will not be in our day that Protestants generally will be content to take up this position in the contest with Popery. There are large intermediate forces lying between, and many a battle is to be fought in which we can take little interest—but when that final struggle does come, it will be with no uncertain trumpet to sound the onset, but Scripture, Reason and Individual Faith on the one side, and Tradition and the Priest with his Ritual on the other.

There is no church rests on broader Protestant ground than ours, or that has carried out more consistently the principles of our Protestant forefathers. It is our ultra Protestantism that has isolated us in the Christian world. We do not cry our Protestantism in the streets. We like not that cry of "No Popery;" because it has often meant a great deal of Popery; it has often meant bigotry and uncharitableness, and personal enmity between man and man; been political and not religious; often a watchword by which honest men have been made the tools of others, to be cast off when their use was done. But if that cry which we now, once more, hear over the land, from the Prime Minister in his Cabinet to Guy Fawkes in the street, were to echo in sincerity through the churches, in one strong bold cry against priestly claims and ecclesiastical pretension in every shape and guise, and were to mean as it ought to mean No Bigotry! No cursing for differences of Faith! No claims to infallibility! No meddlings between a man's soul and his God, but an embracing in Christian fellowship of all that love the Lord Jesus in sincerity! then however hard it is to change old associations with a word, none should re-echo it in their hearts more heartily than we. But if it is to mean merely *Bishop of London, versus Bishop of Rome*, which by virtue of Apostolical Succession has spiritual authority in their realms; if it be a question merely which shall tell us that we shall without doubt perish everlastingly; whether Rome is guilty of schism in sending a Cardinal to Westmin-

ster, or London guilty of schism in rejecting him, then it is a poor affair. Let them fight it out whose quarrel it is. It does not concern us, does not lie in our way.

In conclusion, all this will lead to good. The stirring of the waters will be for the healing of the churches. Thoughtful men will ask many a question for an answer to which they will go neither to London or Rome. Earnest minds will have many and anxious meditation to which they will call in neither Priest nor Curate. They will demand to stand on consistent ground. Protestantism will examine her foundations and look well to her bulwarks, not by any penal enactments infringing on the great principle of religious liberty; there are cool heads and wise hearts enough to prevent that madness; but I trust, by a bolder assumption of the tone of men free in Christ Jesus, and needing neither priest nor priestly rite to bring them near to God. The church of England will be taught that enshrined as she is in the affection of her sons, guarded as she is by the whole power of the state, adorned as she is with all the attractions of fashion, wealth, and influence, yet it is dangerous even for her to play at Popery; that she is thereby exciting an appetite she cannot satisfy as Rome can; and that it were wise to abjure all talk of schism and Apostolical succession, to abate something of that assumption of superiority which she affects towards Dissenters, and which Rome now affects towards herself, and be content to take that high place that is freely awarded her as the most powerful Protestant sect in these realms.

What effect, if any, it is natural for us to ask, is all this agitation likely to have on the diffusion of our peculiar views of the Gospel? What the Tractarians say is this. That having been taught and being well convinced that no man who did not so think of the doctrine of the Trinity as the Athanasian creed teaches, could possibly be saved, they were astounded at discovering that there was no clear teaching of any such doctrine in the New Testament; and that nothing was left for them, if they retained the Gospel at all and were consistent, but either to go to tradition to help out the Scriptures, (and so to Rome,) or carrying out the Protestant rule of faith,—Scripture alone and Private Judgment to interpret,—descend into the bogs and mire of Unitarianism.

Now it is to be hoped that of the many anxious minds before whom this alternative is now placed, some will find reason to choose the latter; will find that they may keep their Christianity without casting themselves into the arms of Rome; and discover that Unitarianism is not that marsh, as those are pleased to call it; but, good, firm, standing ground; on which, as we know, I trust by blessed experience, a man may cherish the hopes of a christian without losing his manliness; may be the servant of Christ, without being the slave of priests; may worship God with a reasonable service; may love his own faith without denouncing others; and have as much assurance as it becomes a sinful man to have, that the good God who made him, will at last for his own rich mercy's sake in Jesus Christ, forgive and accept his soul.

It may be then, that of those whose minds have been unsettled and made thoughtful, at this crisis some will find shelter within our fold. But be that as it may, while we do all that in us lies, by Associations, Tracts, by all lawful expedients, to extend our peculiar doctrinal views; while with no uncertain voice we protest against the unreasonable and unscriptural dogmas of reputed orthodoxy,—let us, if possible, with a yet louder and more earnest voice, say—Only let liberty come to every soul; let Bigotry and Priestcraft die; let the rights of the individual conscience be practically acknowledged; let the hell-born notion depart to its own place, that one man's salvation depends on another man's spiritual ruin, that one sect cannot be savingly right unless the other is damnably wrong, that God cannot receive you, unless he reject me; let the spirit of Christ live, and the spirit of the Devil die; then under whatever *isms* such things prevail, (and men will not believe trinities and transubstantiations, unless salvation is made to rest on them,) we shall be content to say that our work as a distinct sect is done, and be satisfied, as, with such a spirit abroad we believe others would be also, to merge our unhappy sectarian names in the nobler, holier, and truly Catholic one of the Christian. AMEN.

LECTURE FOR THE TIMES:

DELIVERED

IN THE MUSIC HALL, BELFAST,

ON THE EVENING OF FRIDAY, JAN. 24, 1851,

BY

THE REV. H. MONTGOMERY, LL.D.

AND PUBLISHED AT THE REQUEST OF MANY OF
THOSE WHO HEARD IT.

BELFAST:
SOLD AT THE UNITARIAN TRACT DEPOSITORY,
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1851.

LECTURE FOR THE TIMES.

MATTHEW 16TH AND 3D.

"Can ye not discern the signs of the times?"

I. CORINTHIANS 10TH AND 15TH.

"I speak as unto wise men, judge ye what I say."

My Fellow Christians, as many of you may be desirous to know the cause of our assembling at this unusual time and in this unusual place, I deem it my duty to supply you with all the information upon that point which I myself possess.

The proceedings recently adopted by the Bishop of Rome, for the establishment of a regular Roman Catholic Hierarchy in England, having awakened a deep interest in the public mind, and brought the entire question of ecclesiastical authority fairly into consideration, some lay and clerical members of the particular communion with which I am connected, looked upon the existing excitement as affording a favourable opportunity for soliciting attention to certain important principles of Doctrine and Discipline, which, in their estimation, the great Churches of Christendom have long disregarded and set aside. Acting upon this view, they believed that a series of Lectures, conceived in a spirit of candour, and carried forward in a temper of forbearance and charity, might be rendered interesting and instructive, both to those of their own communion and to some of their fellow Christians around them. At the same time, holding in due respect the conscientious scruples of those who consider it improper to enter any place of worship upon the Lord's Day, except their own, or to unite in religious exercises with Christians of other churches, they judiciously determined to engage this spacious hall: to hold their meetings upon the evenings of working-days; to open the proceedings by simply repeating the Lord's Prayer, in which all can join; and to close the business of the evening with an apostolic benediction.

In carrying out their plans, my young friends solicited me

to deliver the first Lecture; and although, after more than twenty years of no ordinary toil in maintaining what I know to be the principles of Christian Liberty, and what I believe to be the principles of Gospel Truth, I was naturally disinclined to resume the somewhat rusted armour of earlier days, I, nevertheless, could not muster selfishness enough to decline a request so kindly preferred, or indifference enough to thwart a project conceived, as I well knew, in no enmity to any sect of Christians, but simply in a becoming love of liberty and truth.

I am vain enough to believe that I am not altogether unworthy to execute the task which has been assigned to me. Through forty years of active public life, I can truly say that I have faithfully laboured "to break every bond," political or religious, by which any class of my countrymen have been enthralled; and although I dare not boast that I have not been sometimes "unduly moved" during the heat of personal conflict, I can solemnly declare that, at this moment, I know not the man towards whom I entertain one sentiment of hostility on religious or political grounds. Amongst all sects and all parties it is my privilege to have kind and valued friends—men of sound minds and generous hearts, who have sympathized with me in troubles, "visited me in sickness," and rejoiced in my humble prosperity. If any, therefore, have come hither in the expectation of hearing a violent attack upon any sect of my fellow Christians they will assuredly be disappointed. The last few months have painfully proved how easy and how gratifying a thing it is to certain natures to employ foul epithets and awaken bad passions: but no man was ever turned from error by calling him a knave or a fool; and all the fierce denunciations of Ballymena, Liverpool, and a thousand other places, have merely dishonoured Protestantism, and produced unchristian irritation.

At the same time, I wish it to be understood, that in my view, the most enlarged toleration and charity do not require us to make no distinction between truth and error. Such confounding of opposite principles is not charity, but indifference; for Paul emphatically declares, that "charity rejoiceth in the truth;" or, in other words, that the removal of error from the mind, and the consequent prevention of its influence on the conduct, is the most substantial and enduring kindness which it is in the power of man to confer upon his brother. On this obvious principle, our divine Master calmly exposed the numerous errors of the Jews, showed how "they had made void the law of God by their traditions," and rebuked them as "teaching for doctrines the commandments of men." Now, there assuredly can be no want of charity or propriety in walking after Him who

"left us an example that we might follow his steps;" and when we see amongst our fellow Christians, not merely the very same errors which He condemned amongst the Jews, but also others of a still more injurious kind, to pass such errors over in silence would not so much evince charity towards man, as utter indifference to the truth of God. At the same time, since error is not moral offence, but simple misfortune, arising generally from circumstances over which men have not any control, we are no more authorized to dislike or injure our brethren because, in our estimation, they hold erroneous doctrines, than we should be justified in punishing them on account of minds naturally feeble, or bodies accidentally deformed. But, if we have no right to injure others, on account of errors in doctrine or church government, they have as little grounds for just offence in our disapprobation of their principles—provided always, that our dissent be expressed in a Christian spirit. What, indeed, is the regular assembling of the different sects in separate places of worship, and their using different creeds and ceremonies, but a practical condemnation of each others' doctrine and discipline: and why should they take offence when the same sentiments are expressed in words which are constantly expressed by actions? For my own part, I know that, as a matter of course, my theological opinions are frequently reprobated by my clerical brethren around me; but if they believe the creeds of their respective churches, and employ courteous language, they only discharge their own duty, and I have no just cause of complaint. On this principle, I shall presently show the grounds of my dissent from the doctrines and discipline of the principal churches of Christendom, and point out some of the mighty evils which long afflicted the world, and which still continue to prevail, through the disastrous influence of their multiplied errors: but, in the execution of this task, I design to give no offence to other churches; nor, assuredly, *shall* I offend, unless an honest statement of their principles and practices, illustrated by historical facts, should unjustly be considered offensive.

Were we to estimate Christianity solely by the violent religious excitement and bitter sectarian animosities so unhappily prevailing, at this moment, in these lands, we should be forced to conclude that it was designed to promote arrogance, exclusiveness, intolerance, and all uncharitableness. In the conduct of churches and the declamations of divines, we perceive no traces of "the wisdom that is from above; which is first pure, then peaceable, gentle, and easy to be entreated: full of mercy and of good fruits; without partiality and without hypocrisy." On the contrary, all appears to be of "the earth, earthy"—full of man's selfishness, and pride, and passions. Seeing this condition of society, whilst we nevertheless believe that the

religion of Jesus is the gift of supreme wisdom and infinite benevolence, we are compelled to infer that some signal departure from the fundamental principles of the Gospel must have occurred; and as the physician often derives much advantage in the application of his remedies from studying the constitution and history of his patient, so may we, under present circumstances, receive both instruction and profit from a rapid glance at the origin and progress of Christianity.

When idolatry prevailed amongst all the nations of the earth, with the exception of God's "peculiar people," the Jews—when that people themselves perverted the truth which they had received, and substituted the observance of empty ceremonies and hypocritical worship for the practice of moral duty—"when darkness covered the earth, and there was none to do righteousness, no, not one:" our Heavenly Father, in his pure benignity, caused "the Sun of Righteousness to arise, with healing under his wings, to be a light to them that sat in darkness, and in the valley of the shadow of death." On the advent of this glorious messenger of divine grace, the angelic host, in contemplation of his office and his work, proclaimed "glory unto God in the highest; and on earth peace, goodwill towards men."

From a teacher thus commissioned to a dark and sinful world, what kind of religion should we naturally expect to receive? A religion unquestionably adapted to the nature, the capacities, and the wants of those for whose benefit it was designed. We accordingly find, on looking into the Gospel, that its principles are beautifully clear and intelligible—admirably calculated "to make wise the simple, and to convert the soul that lieth in sin." We do not perceive in it even one of those alleged doctrines to which churches, in later days, have claimed "unfeigned assent and consent," on pain of everlasting perdition. We see in it none of those "incomprehensible mysteries," which men now so strangely denominate "fundamental doctrines;" and for this plain reason: a mystery, as the very word implies, is a secret, or something unrevealed, which consequently cannot become an object of belief; and that which is incomprehensible, shedding no light upon the understanding, can produce no effect upon the heart or the life of man. In direct opposition to such human errors, our Great Master sets it forth as a special evidence of the divine authority of his religion, that "to the poor the Gospel is preached:" or, in other words, that Christianity, being designed to promote the good and happiness of all, is so plain in its essential principles, as to be easily understood by the humblest and least instructed of mankind.

In drinking of "the waters of life," therefore, at the foun-

tain head, where they issue immediately from the throne of God, "through our smitten rock, which is Christ," all is pure, refreshing, and delightful. We find one Supreme Object of veneration, and love, and confidence, and worship—the ever-present and ever-bountiful friend of man—"the God and Father of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ." To that glorious Being, our souls are raised in abiding trust, by the blessed views which He has given us of his free grace and pardoning mercy, through that beloved Son whom He sanctified, and sent into the world, "to redeem us from all iniquity, and purify us unto himself a peculiar people, zealous of good works." In Jesus, "the Mediator of the New Covenant," we behold a distinct object of affection and gratitude, who pursues in heaven, "at the right hand of the Father," the plan of grace which he commenced upon earth, and who, by the appointment of God, "shall judge the world in righteousness" at the great day. In all our fellow-men, the Gospel teaches us to see "brethren"—children of a common Father, disciples of a common Master, partakers of common frailties, and heirs of common hopes. Churches may encourage their members to revile and persecute all who do not see with their eyes, hear with their ears, and understand with their hearts; and arrogantly denounce better men than themselves as the enemies of God and the destroyers of souls; but amidst all this disgraceful clamour, the gentle voice of the Redeemer is heard, saying—"A new commandment I give unto you, that ye love one another, as I have loved you. By this shall all men know that ye are my disciples, if you have love one towards another." In truth, this earnest inculcation of brotherly kindness and charity is the distinguishing feature of the Gospel; and next to it, in repeated enforcement, stands the doctrine which teaches that man's moral regeneration in this world is essential to his preparation for happiness in the world to come. On this point, as if providing a counterpoise against the demoralizing theories of coming ages, the language of Jesus is particularly emphatic. "In that day, many will say unto me, in thy name we have done many wonderful works; but I will say unto them, I know you not: depart from me, all ye that work iniquity. Not every one that saith unto me, Lord, Lord, shall enter into the kingdom of heaven; but he only who doeth the will of my Father which is in heaven. Then shall the Son of Man come in the glory of his Father, and reward every man according to his works."

Such, my fellow Christians, is a condensed summary of the plain, rational, benevolent, sanctifying doctrines, inculcated by the Son of God, whilst he sojourned upon earth; and, after he ascended to the Father, the New Testament Records

clearly prove that no doctrines of an opposite kind were ever taught by his inspired Apostles or their immediate companions. The official rank of Jesus, as the Messiah promised to the Jews; his special relation to God as the only-begotten Son; and the crowning fact of his resurrection from the dead, are evidently the grand points enforced by the Apostles. When the Ethiopian desired to be baptized by Philip, the Apostle replied—"If thou believest with all thine heart, thou mayest: and he said, I believe that Jesus Christ is the Son of God: and he baptized him." To the same effect, we have the testimony of the beloved disciple John: "Whosoever confesseth that Jesus is the Son of God, God dwelleth in him and he in God:" and Paul says, "If thou believe in thine heart that God raised him from the dead, thou shalt be saved." Such were the easy terms of communion, and such the simple confessions of faith, "in early, uncorrupted times;" and such they mainly continued to be during the first three centuries of the Christian era, notwithstanding some speculative errors occasionally introduced by Jewish and heathen converts. The several Churches, indeed, being entirely independent of each other, there were no means of framing or enforcing any human formula of belief, even if there had existed a desire to draw it up, and to interfere with the exercise of individual liberty in the free interpretation of the Sacred Records. Each congregation, as it acquired strength, had usually selected some person of mature years and approved wisdom, either from its own members or from some neighbouring Church, to minister to it in the word and ordinances. This individual was sometimes called Presbyter, on account of his age, and sometimes Bishop, or Overseer, on account of his office. In fact, he was merely the elected pastor of a particular congregation: and, in this primitive acceptation of the term, every dissenting minister, freely chosen by the people, is more properly a bishop, than those who wear robes and mitres by the appointment of popes or princes. It is evident, however, that the early bishops exercised no authority beyond the pale of their respective flocks; and although it is well known that those in particular districts assembled, from time to time, for the sake of counsel and encouragement, none claimed any official authority over their brethren. Superior talents, attainments, and piety, may have secured personal influence, as they still do in the freest voluntary associations; but, in pastoral rank, all were prefectly equal. In fact, there were many bishops, but no prelates: that is, all were overseers, but none enjoyed pre-eminence. Such individuals, therefore, could not have framed a creed for the Churches; and, indeed, so far from aiming at authority beyond their own sphere, they seem to have scrupulously re-

spected the Christian liberty even of their own congregations. Even Paul, the miraculously converted and divinely inspired, demanded no unreasoning submission to *his* authority. He desired to convince the understandings, and not "to enslave the souls" of those whom he addressed. "We *persuade* men," saith the great Apostle to the Gentiles; "We *beseech* you, in Christ's stead, be ye reconciled unto God;" "Let every man be fully persuaded in his *own* mind;" "I speak as unto wise men, *judge* ye what I say." How interesting and instructive is such gentle and unassuming language, from the lips of the chosen servant of God! How different from the dogmatical and arrogant tone of the puniest creature, in our own days, who struts about in the livery of some creed-bound Church!

Whilst, however, from the causes to which I have just adverted, the first three centuries were happily exempted from all the evils of human articles of faith, and all the tyranny of organized church authority, they have fortunately supplied us with a document which abundantly shows the interpretation then put, by the great body of believers, upon the sacred scriptures, in relation to certain opinions, erroneously called doctrines, which have since created endless controversy, kindled the brand of persecution, and afflicted the Christian world. The document to which I refer, is familiarly known to you all, by the name of "the Apostles' Creed;" and was long believed to have been drawn up by a council of the Apostles. Whilst this view of its origin, however, is now considered untenable, it is nevertheless admitted to be of great antiquity, and was probably composed by some individual about the middle of the second century, as we find it approvingly referred to, a short time afterwards, by several writers. But, whatsoever may have been its origin, it is admitted to have embodied the general views of the church during the early centuries of the Christian era. Now, it is conceded in relation to human laws, that their meaning is best determined by the decisions of eminent Judges, shortly after their enactment—on this obvious principle, that such judges enjoyed opportunities of knowing the views of the legislators, and the circumstances in which the laws originated. Applying this fair reasoning to the Apostles' Creed, we are authorized to infer that it embodies the opinions of the Apostles themselves, transmitted through the Apostolic Fathers, and others who derived their views of Christian truth from the earliest and best authorities. We know that a stream always becomes purer the nearer we approach the fountain head; and, consequently, we ascribe greater weight to the Apostles' Creed, as an exposition of Christian doctrines, than to the complicated and self-contradictory creeds of later and darker times. The document runs thus:—

I believe in God the Father Almighty, Maker of heaven and earth;

And in Jesus Christ his only Son our Lord, Who was conceived by the Holy Ghost, Born of the Virgin Mary, Suffered under Pontius Pilate, Was crucified, dead, and buried, He descended into hell; the third day he rose again from the dead; He ascended into heaven, And sitteth on the right hand of God the Father Almighty; From thence he shall come to judge the quick and the dead.

I believe in the Holy Ghost; The holy Catholic Church; The Communion of Saints, The Forgiveness of Sins; The Resurrection of the body, And the life everlasting. Amen.

To this creed, with the exception of the clauses refering to Christ's descent into hell, and the Holy Catholic Church, which were not in the original document, I cheerfully subscribe; although I am well aware that some portions of it are rejected by learned and excellent Unitarians. But take it as it stands, and it does not contain one word in support of that dogma, which the Great churches of Christendom denominate the fundamental doctrine of the gospel. On the contrary, it is a clear anti-Trinitarian creed from beginning to end. The distinction between the Father and the Son is complete in everything: in their nature, in their works, in their relations. The very idea of Father involves priority of existence: sitting at the right hand of God implies the highest dignity except sitting upon the throne, but it clearly excludes the possibility of identity: and the work of judgment is expressly a delegated trust, for "the Father judgeth no man, but hath *committed* all judgment to the Son."

What, then, are we authorized to infer from this creed? Clearly, that the doctrine of a Triune God had no existence at the time in which it was written. Would any modern Doctor of the Churches of Rome, or England, or Scotland, think you, employ such language to express *his* views concerning the three persons of the Trinity, and the relations which they bear to one another? No: he would honestly supply clear and definite statements of his views. And can we suppose that the fathers of the church, in earlier and purer days, would have suppressed a doctrine which they knew or believed to be essential and fundamental? Such an opinion would be utterly unworthy of the illustrious and intrepid men who, during the reigns of several Roman emperors, nobly bore aloft the ensign of the cross, in defiance of scourgings, imprisonments, and death! No, brethren, there is but one way of accounting for their silence: they knew no other doctrine than that which they taught—that "God is one, and his name one."

Two other circumstances demand a moment's notice in rela-

tion to the beautiful churches of early times. Though bound together by no creed but the Scriptures of Truth, that sacred tie united them in the tenderest bonds of brotherly love. For a considerable time, "they had all things in common;" no real want remained unsupplied, no sorrow continued unassuaged, which sympathy could mitigate. And then, in the dark hours of persecution, like members of the same family in seasons of deep affliction, they clung together with such a holy and abiding affection, that their very enemies exclaimed, as we learn from good authority—"Behold how these Christians love one another!" To this enduring affection, the early followers of Jesus "added a walk and conversation worthy of the high vocation wherewith they were called." Amidst the pollutions of idolatry, they remained comparatively uncorrupted; so that their exemplary lives formed a beautiful commentary upon their holy faith.

I have lingered for a moment to contemplate the delightful picture of this primitive, creedless, loving, unpatronised, Gospel church—like the traveller who turns his parting gaze upon the fair scenes of some peaceful vale through which he has journeyed, ere he begins to ascend some rugged and barren mountain, over which he is compelled to pass. Behind me, I see a Bible Church, full of love, and piety, and holiness, sacrificing nothing but itself in the cause of truth; before me, I behold churches of human creeds, patronised by the powers of earth, gorgeous in riches, and steeped in worldly pleasures, but defiled by tyranny and imposture, by lust and blood! Would to God that I had a more pleasing and less invidious duty to discharge than that of pointing out the rise, progress, and consequences of error in the churches of Christ! but we cannot adequately understand our present position without a reference to the past; and the faithful surgeon must not shrink from inflicting some pain both upon himself and his patient, in the adequate performance of a needful operation.

Many of you are aware, that when Christ appeared upon earth, the Roman Empire embraced almost the whole of the then known world. A State, however, so colossal, was sure in process of time to sink under its own weight; and the repeated contentions of military leaders for the throne, tended to hasten its fall. At the beginning of the fourth century, two powerful competitors claimed the imperial purple—the one, Maxentius, who commanded in the east, and the other, Constantine, who exercised authority in the west. In the year 312, those two commanders, at the head of powerful armies, approached the city of Rome from opposite points, to decide the empire of the world. In the army of Constantine large numbers of Christians were enrolled; and with a view to inspire them with

religious enthusiasm, he one day pretended that he had been favoured with the miraculous vision of a fiery cross in the heavens, bearing the inscription, "*Under this standard you shall conquer.*" In accordance with this alleged intimation from on high, he placed the cross upon all his banners; and boldly advancing towards the enemy, the Christian soldiers rushed forward in perfect confidence of success, and gained a signal victory over the legions of Maxentius.

This event seemed to be truly auspicious to the Christians; for instead of being frequently persecuted, or at the best, merely tolerated as a sect of harmless fanatics, they thenceforth basked in the sunshine of imperial favour; crowds of distinguished converts joined their churches; their clergy, arrayed in gorgeous robes, in imitation of the heathen priests, swarmed in the halls of nobles, and in the palace of the Cæsars. Constantine, it is true, had not yet declared himself to be a Christian; but his very protection gave power, and no arts were omitted which seemed calculated to draw him into the bosom of the church. As the emperor was a worshipper of Jupiter, the king of the heathen gods, the Christian clergy seem to have formed the project of augmenting the dignity of the founder of their own religion, by representing Jesus as a participator in the attributes and authority of Jehovah—the Supreme Ruler of the Universe. In carrying out this plan, they particularly dwelt upon the glowing metaphorical descriptions of the Old Testament, in relation to the majesty and power of the promised Messiah, and those portions of the New Testament which represent the intimate union and affectionate co-operation subsisting between the Father and the Son. This magnifying process gradually advanced until about the year 320, when the Bishop of Alexandria maintained in an assembly of the clergy, "that the Son possesses not only the same dignity as the Father, but also the same essence;" or in other words, that God and Christ are identical. To this allegation of the bishop, Arius, a presbyter of the same church, whom Mosheim, the great and candid historian, calls "a man of acuteness and fluency," immediately replied—maintaining that the Son is totally and essentially distinct from the Father, and merely the first and noblest of created beings, whom God especially honoured and loved—employing him, first, in the creation of the material universe, and finally, in the redemption of mankind.

Such was the origin of that controversy, with regard to the nature and person of Christ, which, through many centuries, deluged the earth with blood; and which, even in our own days, has produced bitter alienation and ungenerous acts amongst children of the same gracious Parent, and professing disciples of the same benevolent Master.

Previously to the commencement of this contest, and particularly since the recognition of Christianity by Constantine, bishops had gradually acquired an official influence over the other clergy in their several localities; and the Bishop of Alexandria speedily wreaked his vengeance upon Arius, by accusing him of blasphemy, and procuring his expulsion from Egypt. Nothing disheartened, however, he retired into Palestine, where he zealously and successfully advocated his doctrines as those of the gospel and the apostolic church; and not long afterwards, two hundred and fifty bishops, from the most enlightened portions of Christendom, assembled in Asia Minor, for the support of his cause. Counter assemblages were held in Egypt, and perhaps in other places; so that the flame of controversy rapidly spread throughout the entire church. The emperor, though utterly indifferent to the merits of the dispute, was prevailed upon, probably by the enemies of Arius, to call a council of the whole church, with a view to the restoration of religious peace. This first General Council he convened in a hall of the imperial palace, at Nice, in Bithynia, in the year 325; and it appears to have been attended by three hundred and eighteen bishops. According to the most candid historians, the emperor took his seat at the upper end of the hall, and after addressing the Council, he desired them to proceed with the discussion, which lasted several days. During the whole time, however, according to Mosheim, he frequently mingled in the debate—"remarking, commending, or disapproving; and so influencing the entire proceedings, as to bring about a considerable degree of unanimity." As had been anticipated by those who advised the calling of the council, the doctrine of Arius was summarily condemned, and he was himself driven into exile. A creed was framed in conformity with the views of the Bishop of Alexandria; Christ was authoritatively declared to be of the same essence with God; the emperor pledged himself to enforce the decrees of the council; and thus was solemnized the first fatal union between Church and State. The formula of faith drawn up on that occasion, after receiving a few finishing touches at the Council of Constantinople, in the year 381, is used in the service of the churches of Rome and England as "The Nicene Creed;" and forms, likewise, the substratum of alleged orthodoxy in all the other great churches of the world. To some of you it is, doubtless, well known; but, for the sake of others, I shall repeat it.

"I believe in one God, the Father Almighty, Maker of heaven and earth, and of all things visible and invisible:

"And in one Lord Jesus Christ, the only-begotten Son of God, Begotten of his Father before all worlds, God of God, Light of Light, Very God of very God, Begotten, not made, Being of one substance with the Father. By whom all things were made: Who for us men, and for our salvation came down from heaven, And was incarnate by the Holy Ghost of the Virgin Mary, and was made Man, And was crucified also for us under Pontius Pilate. He suffered and was buried, And the third day he rose again according to the Scriptures, and ascended into heaven, And sitteth on the right hand of the Father. And he shall come again with glory to judge both the quick and the dead, Whose kingdom shall have no end.

"And I believe in the Holy Ghost, The Lord and Giver of Life, Who proceedeth from the Father and the Son, Who with the Father and the Son together is worshipped and glorified, Who spake by the Prophets. And I believe in one Catholic and Apostolic church. I acknowledge one Baptism for the remission of sins, And I look for the Resurrection of the dead, And the life of the world to come. Amen."

It would be incompatible with my present purpose to impugn the peculiar doctrines of this creed, or to comment upon the unscriptural terms in which they are, for the most part, set forth; but as it was *the first formal Creed of the Church*, framed under the dictation of the civil power, and rigorously enforced by temporal pains and penalties, it may not be unprofitable to devote a moment's attention to certain circumstances connected with its creation.

It is very questionable whether Constantine the Great ever became a Christian, as he was not baptized until within a few hours of his death; but it is certain, at all events, that he was a heathen when he presided over the Council of Nice, and controlled its deliberations by influence and threats. The council was held in the vicinity of Nicomedia, where two hundred and fifty bishops, not long before, had expressed their warm sympathy with the adherents of Arius; and those very men are believed to have constituted the majority of the Council of Nice: and yet, at the close of the proceedings, only seventeen bishops refused to vote for the banishment of Arius, and two only, out of three hundred and eighteen, declined subscription to the Nicene Creed! To what cause are we to ascribe this remarkable condition of affairs? Had any new light been cast upon the subject? No: it was a plain matter, previously and perfectly understood. Was Constantine a profound theologian, who forced conviction by Scripture? No: but he was emperor of the world; and the courtly successors of those who had patiently suffered persecution for the truth, meekly placed their necks under the foot of an idolator. No one

can doubt for a moment, that if Constantine had favoured Arius, the result would have been entirely different; and Unitarianism might, this day, be unfortunately standing forth as the patronized orthodoxy of the world. Whether, therefore, the doctrines of the Nicene Creed be true or false, one thing is certain—it had, as a creed, a worthless origin, and must ever stand before mankind as the spurious offspring of imperial heathenism and Christian subserviency.

Since the fatal day on which this human creed was framed, the church of Christ, as a whole, has enjoyed no more liberty, seen no more peace. Man had audaciously interfered with the prerogative of God, and coerced the conscience of his brother. Thenceforward, as a natural result, the church was sometimes the ally, sometimes the tool, and sometimes the controller of States; but, through all its varied fortunes, it continued to be essentially human—human in its pride, its selfishness, its tyranny, and its crimes. Through the tardy repentance of the emperor, Arius was recalled from exile, in the year 330; and the Bishop of Constantinople was enjoined to admit him to communion. Some zealous advocate of the Nicene doctrine, however, prevented his receiving the sacred emblems: a subtle poison was administered with his food, and he died a shocking death by the cruelty of man, on his way to the church of the Redeemer!

Such was the first great crime perpetrated in support of the first human creed: but neither the death of Arius nor the decree of Nice, was able, at once, to establish the Trinitarian doctrine. The sons of Constantine, after his death, adopted different views on the subject of dispute—the clergy and churches of the empire were equally divided—and hence, says Mosheim, "there were no bounds and no end to the broils, the tumults, the conspiracies, and the wrongs which ensued." The two parties, I freely admit, were equally to be blamed; for, although the Trinitarians may have taken the fore-way in cruelty, the Unitarians were not slow to follow their example whenever they obtained the ascendancy. Up to the year 357, Mosheim truly states, "that a war among brethren was carried on without religion, justice, or humanity." Subsequently, towards the end of the fourth century, the emperors, Valentinian and Theodosius, being stern Trinitarians, persecuted the believers in the simple unity of God with unrelenting cruelty; "so that none could any longer profess Arian doctrines, except among the Goths, Vandals, and other barbarous nations."

We have thus seen, my brethren, the bitter first-fruits of man's interference with the religion of heaven: and, here, to obviate misconception, I may state, once for all, that I neither affirm nor believe Trinitarians to be less amiable or less

humane than Unitarians. I rejoice to know, from a thousand delightful recollections and associations, that they are not: yet, they must themselves feel, that in consequence of their views having been uniformly held by the advocates of human interference in matters of faith, a reflected discredit has been cast upon them, by the crimes and persecutions of past ages. In fact, they suffer by implication, from the evils of an unhappy system; for all great persecutors, in all churches, since the fourth century, have been Trinitarians. It would be an inference, however, equally illogical and unjust, to assume that Trinitarian opinions have, from their very nature, produced persecution. Of such unchristian injustice, I never have been, and never shall be guilty; for, I am quite aware that men are ever ready to gild base metal, and to cast bright robes over foul deformities. Their base selfishness, their unworthy love of power, their bad and angry passions, and sometimes, perhaps, even their mistaken views of duty, have led them to frame laws for coercing the consciences of their brethren, and to adopt infamous means for the enforcement of these laws. But these crying evils were the results of that anti-Christian system which arrogantly sanctions the dictation of man in the things of God, and not the necessary fruits of a theological speculation. In point of fact, a belief in the Trinity has, of all theories, the least practical tendencies; and whilst I feel persuaded that many other doctrines of the Romish and Protestant Churches may exercise an injurious moral influence amongst the more ignorant members of their respective communions, I do not think that any man was ever rendered a sinner or a persecutor, simply by believing in the deity of the Son of God. He may have sinned or persecuted, through the power of other causes, and other dogmas; but I am quite convinced that the great body of my Trinitarian brethren, as such, abhor as much as I do, the enormities committed by their fellow-believers since the dark days of the Council of Nice: and most of them, I am happy to believe, utterly repudiate "the damnatory clauses," of the Athanasian Creed, which was composed towards the end of the fourth century, in order to explain and prop up the Formula of the Nicene Fathers.

Persecutions, however, and the countenance given to an erroneous doctrine, were not the only evils which resulted from the introduction of human authority in the concerns of religion. In a Church, controlled by the State, the clergy not unnaturally commenced a fierce and persevering struggle for places of power and pre-eminence. Four bishops, in particular, contended for supremacy over the entire Church, viz. the bishops of Rome, Antioch, Alexandria, and Constantinople. Each of these, by political subserviency, and other mean com-

pliances, endeavoured to secure the support of the emperors; but in a short time, the bishops of Rome and Constantinople remained the only competitors for the highest episcopal throne. The Roman prelate founded his claims to govern the whole Church upon the fact of his residence in the ancient capital of the empire, and the greatest city of the world; whilst the high-priest of Constantinople rested his claims on the ground of his being the emperor's immediate pastor, in the new capital of the East. During several hundred years, the contest was carried on with edifying vigor, and the usual exhibition of prelatical pride and bitterness. Those who occupied the respective Sees, cordially abused and excommunicated each other, and the various bishops and clergy enrolled themselves under that standard which best suited their convenience or interest. Finally, the Roman prelate obtained the support of the new Emperors of the West and the greater portion of the Christian world: but, his rival of Constantinople, instead of submitting to his authority, entirely separated himself from the General Church, and placed himself at the head of that ecclesiastical organization which still prevails in the Russian empire and other portions of the East, under the title of the Greek Church.

I have adverted to this episcopal competition, mainly for the purpose of showing that during its progress, and to bear upon its result, were chiefly developed many of those extraordinary assumptions and pretensions of the Bishop of Rome which have since exercised so large an influence in the Christian world; and which, in reality, are the remote causes of our present assembling—so wonderful are the dependencies of events, and so little are men able to calculate the results of causes merely local and apparently unimportant.

The head of the Heathen Hierarchy, at Rome, duly estimating the amazing influence of names and appearances, had assumed the title of *Pontifex Maximus*, or Chief-Priest; and he never appeared before the multitude without being clothed in vestments of the most gorgeous and costly description. In close imitation of this dethroned dignitary of Paganism, the Roman bishop also assumed the title of *Pontiff*, or Chief-Priest; and, as evidencing his parental control over the church, he also took the name of *Papa*, or Father, or according to our usage, *Pope*. In carrying out the imitation of his heathen precursor, he did not fail to invest himself in glaring apparel, in order to dazzle the multitude: he put on, besides, as evidence of his ecclesiastical supremacy, a jewelled tiara, or triple crown, indicating, as some allege, his sovereignty over Asia, Africa, and Europe, the only three portions of the earth then known—or, as others maintain, shadowing forth his authority over earth,

and hell, and heaven. Whilst, however, he thus degraded his manhood and his office, by investing himself in the vain womanly trappings of a heathen priest, he claimed a higher origin for his pontifical authority. He declared that he was, through an unbroken chain of bishops, the regular, divinely constituted successor of Saint Peter, who was "the prince of the Apostles," and the first Pope of Rome. Now, my brethren, we have no Scripture warrant for believing that Peter ever *was* at Rome; and the evidence of his having been so, derived from other authorities, is entirely inconclusive. Paul, however, according to *The Acts of the Apostles*, was the first Apostle who visited that city, where he preached the Gospel, and "dwelt three whole years in his own hired house." Besides, he wrote an important *Epistle to the Romans;* and visiting them again, he suffered martyrdom in the reign of Nero. Surely, therefore, Paul's claim to be considered the first bishop of Rome, stands pre-eminent. Why, then, have his evident claims been postponed by the Romish Church, to the shadowy pretensions of Peter?

"The why is plain as way to parish church."

Peter, as his entire history proves, was an ardent and obtrusive man; so that, on several occasions, when our Blessed Lord addressed his assembled disciples, he answered in the name of the whole. On one occasion, in particular, Jesus desiring to ascertain what were the views entertained respecting him by themselves and others, Peter replied—"Thou art the Christ, the son of the living God."

Pleased with this correct estimate of his character, as the promised Messiah, our Saviour, in accordance with a custom usual in eastern countries, referring to the radical meaning of the name *Peter*, which, as derived from the Greek, signifies *a stone*, rejoined: "And I say, also, unto thee, thou art Peter; and on this rock will I build my church; and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it:" or in plainer words, my religion shall be everlasting. But what was this rock, or firm foundation, on which Jesus declared that he would build his church? Assuredly it was not the mere name of Peter, but his admission that "Jesus was the Christ, the Son of the living God." This Sonship of Christ, this Messianic character of Jesus, is the imperishable basis upon which the entire structure of Christianity rests. "No other foundation," saith Paul, "can any man lay, than that which is laid, which is Jesus Christ." And yet, strange to say, the Church of Rome *does* lay another foundation—the name of a frail and inconsistent mortal, who, in the hour of trial, denied his Master! So far, indeed, was Peter

from being "the prince of the Apostles," as Romanists allege, or even a favoured Apostle, that Jesus had often occasion to condemn his violent spirit; and in a succeeding verse, after approving of the Apostle's declaration relative to his Messiahship, he sternly rebuked him in these words—"Get thee behind me, Satan: thou art an offence unto me; for thou savourest not the things that be of God, but those that be of men." Instead of being a prince amongst the Apostles, Paul informs us, in after years, that "he withstood Peter to the face, and rebuked him sharply, because he was to be blamed." We are left in no doubt, however, as to the special reasons which induced the Church of Rome to claim a lineal descent from Peter, for, besides commending that Apostle's view of his character as the Messiah, Jesus immediately added these words: "I will give unto thee the keys of the kingdom of heaven; and whatsoever thou shalt bind on earth shall be bound in heaven; and whatsoever thou shalt loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven." Unfortunately, however, for those who rest Peter's supremacy upon this text, the Lord Jesus, after his resurrection, conferred the very same power, in a still more solemn manner, upon *all* the Apostles, in these memorable words: "Peace be unto you: as my Father hath sent me, even so send I you. And he breathed on them, and said: Receive ye the Holy Ghost: whose soever sins ye remit, they are remitted unto them; and whose sins soever ye retain, they are retained." Here, then, Peter obtained no ascendancy; and, if one were constituted pope, all were popes. But to plain men, disposed to see the truth, these passages are perfectly intelligible. Jesus was about to leave his Apostles in the world to establish the Gospel Dispensation, which he frequently calls the "kingdom of heaven;" and to enable them to execute this task he conferred upon them the gift of the Holy Spirit; or, in other words, such divine illumination as would enable them infallibly to judge and act aright, in all things pertaining to their sacred duties. Thus, they were supernaturally qualified to use "the keys of the kingdom of heaven"—that is, to admit men, on proper conditions, into the Christian communion. After admission, however, some might commit offence; and the apostles were to decide whether such individuals should be re-admitted to communion, or permanently excluded from it: that is, to them was committed the entire question of church-fellowship; and as they were divinely directed, God would consequently approve of their decisions. This was the sole remission or retention of sins with which they were entrusted; and the words of Christ have not the slightest reference to the pardon or retention of sins committed against God. Even if the Apostles, however, *had* possessed such power by divine in-

spiration and permission, there is not a tittle of evidence in Scripture, in reason, or in authentic historical statements, to show that they had authority to communicate their peculiar gifts to others. And yet, my brethren, upon the unscriptural and unreasonable supposition that they did possess and exercise such power, the entire fabric of Popery is based, as well as no inconsiderable portion of Protestant orthodoxy. On this supposition, the infallibility of Peter, in particular, is alleged to have been transmitted, in regular succession, to all bishops of Rome, down to the present day; and to have been diffused through them into all the councils and doctrines of the church. The transmission of his power to forgive sins, is alleged to be co-extensive with the ministry of the true church—meaning, of course, the Roman Catholic church—and, as these two assumptions have produced and are producing crying evils in the Christian world, they demand a passing notice.

The word Infallibility means the clear perception of what is true, without the possibility of error: but such a power can only rest in man by the immediate inspiration of God. How, then, can the Romish church prove that such a faculty ever existed, either in popes or councils? It cannot be proved from the New Testament; for, in the entire record, there is not a single allusion to a transmitted inspiration. Perhaps it may be proved by tradition, which the Council of Trent places upon a par with the Bible, and which practically, I fear, is too often placed above it. But what is tradition more than a collection of idle tales, transmitted from age to age, and modified as times and circumstances required: just as Mahomet, in every difficulty, received a new and appropriate chapter of the Koran? Indeed, instead of receiving anything as true, on the ground of tradition, its very name involves suspicion and doubt. It brings no conviction, therefore, to say that tradition maintains the primacy of Peter, and the perpetual transmission to his successors of all the spiritual gifts which he had himself received from the Holy Ghost. But although the infallibility of the church cannot be established by Scripture or tradition, perhaps it may be proved by reason and fact. Now, does reason or observation tell us anything of unerring wisdom in man? No; every individual is admitted to be essentially fallible; and no possible aggregation of erring creatures could produce an unerring judgment. In fact, error prevails most largely in masses, where there is generally a sacrifice of individual convictions. As in chemical compounds, the several ingredients are often so changed that the whole does not contain any one of its constituent parts in its original form: thus, in the decrees and creeds of churches, which are the most miserable of all compounds, and the most degrading of all compromises, the indivi-

dual opinions of no single man are likely to be found precisely as they exist in his own mind. Yet, whilst on this obvious principle, the creed of a church is seldom the creed of its constituent members, the clergy have been found bold enough, in a thousand instances, to force upon others what they did not believe themselves. Most sincerely do I think that, from the Council of Nice downwards, not a single creed-making assembly has been thoroughly honest. And yet such conclaves have modelled the religion of nations—given permanency to creeds and ceremonies palpably at variance with the teachings of the Bible—trodden down the civil and religious liberties of empires—and shed, in torrents, the best blood of earth. So thoroughly have assumptions of infallibility on the part of churches debased the human mind, in countless instances, that men and women, amiable and clear-sighted in all the ordinary concerns of life, actually believe their creeds even in opposition to the evidence of their own senses, and turn a deaf ear to those portions of God's word which contravene the teachings of man. The assumption of infallibility, therefore, is not merely a piece of harmless arrogance: it has dwarfed the understandings of men, by preventing free inquiry; it has perpetuated pernicious errors in churches; and at this present moment, amongst ourselves, it is disturbing the harmony of social life.

I freely admit, however, that the Church of Rome is a wonderful monument of human ingenuity. There is not a passion or affection of the heart to which it does not, in some way, address itself, either by encouragement or soothing. It fills the dwellings of its people with invisible saints, as with gentle household gods—it unburthens the sinful heart in confession to a venerated pastor and friend—it heals the wounds of the spirit by bodily sacrifices—it dries the tears of the mourner, by showing that fervent prayers may alleviate the sufferings of departed friends—and, above all, it brings comfort to the sinner, in the firm conviction that God has given to his chosen priesthood the undoubted power to absolve from crime. All these views I believe to be erroneous; but they must be delightful to those who truly hold them: and I am not surprised at the tenacity with which men cling to them, amidst the sins and sorrows of an anxious world. Two of them, however, I believe to be eminently injurious—Confession, as humiliating individuals, and placing a monstrous power in the hands of the priesthood; Absolution, as amongst the ignorant masses, virtually giving encouragement to sin, in the security of pardon. With unfeigned Christian regard for my Roman Catholic brethren, and without arrogating any superiority in myself, either intellectual or moral, I earnestly entreat them, "in the bonds of love," seriously to consider the nature and tendency of the doc-

trine of Absolution. I make this appeal in particular to the laity. Now, my brethren, what is the doctrine of Absolution, as held by the Church of Rome? As I conceive, it is undisguisedly this: that every priest of that church possesses, by divine authority, full and perfect power to blot out the offences of men, and to leave the criminal pure before God, as if he had never committed offence. It is useless to allege that Absolution is only given to those that truly repent; for, if the penitence be genuine, God abundantly pardons it of his own free grace, without human intervention; but, if the professed repentance be insincere, then the priestly absolution is at once unprofitable to man, and a solemn mockery of God. I put the advocates of this doctrine into this dilemma—either the repentance is sincere, and absolution is unnecessary; or the sinner remains impenitent, and absolution is utterly without profit. In all sincerity, I know nothing more to be deprecated than the unauthorized assumption of fallible men to be the searchers of hearts, and to interfere with the sole prerogative of God, in the pardon of sin. Believe me, brethren, the absolution of ten thousand priests, with the Bishop of Rome at their head, could not erase one single stain of guilt from the impenitent heart of man. But the assumption of such power is a trifling evil, compared with its unhappy influences amongst the masses of mankind. With the educated and civilized members of the Roman Catholic communion—with the multitudes of excellent men and women, in all countries, whose religious and moral perceptions have been duly cultivated, such a doctrine may have no injurious practical result; but, I sincerely believe, that amongst the ignorant masses of the world, it has so blinded the eyes of millions as to prevent their clearly seeing the enormity of sin or adequately dreading its consequences.

What, indeed, but the doctrines of Infallibility and Absolution, mainly produced all the atrocities that equally disgraced religion and humanity, from the Council of Nice to the time of the Reformation? I have no desire to harrow up your feelings, and by implication, to cast undeserved reproach upon my Roman Catholic brethren of the present day, by dwelling upon the deplorable scenes of those dark ages, when Council after Council, in pretended infallibility, passed persecuting decrees—when Popes waded through blood to the imaginary chair of Saint Peter, and stained it with incestuous lust—when the people were virtually prohibited from reading the Scriptures, and compelled to offer mindless worship in an unknown tongue—when the great body of the clergy wallowed in sensuality, and monasteries and convents were the abodes of pollution—when pious frauds, and pretended miracles, and the sale of relics,

deluded and impoverished the people; when the appalling Inquisition tortured thousands by the rack, consigned them to the flames, or shut them up in living tombs, for the crime of alleged heresy—when swarms of impostors and Jesuits pervaded the earth, maintaining that it "was lawful to do evil that good might come"—when Popes dethroned kings, disposed of diadems, and arrayed armies against armies—and finally, when men calling themselves the vicars of Christ, profligately sold Indulgences, or Absolutions, for all sins, past, present, and future. We cannot efface the records of history; but it would be invidious to enter into the detail of events, which I am sure our Roman Catholic brethren deplore as deeply as we can do; and in the disgrace of which they are no more involved than I am in the crimes of the early Arians when they persecuted Trinitarians in the reign of Constantius. Indeed, I should not have adverted to them at all, had it not been to show that, under the government of God, "who maketh the wrath of man to praise Him," the tyranny of the church, and the immoral lives of the clergy, prepared the way for the Reformation. The shameless sale of Indulgences was the proximate cause of that important event; but it was merely the last pound which made the burthen intolerable, under which the people had long been groaning.

Martin Luther, a German monk, had sagacity enough "to discern the signs of the times," and courage enough to confront the whole power of Rome. Not only did he denounce the traffic in Indulgences, but when reviled and threatened, he boldly advanced to the assault of other doctrines; so that, in a short time, the principal errors of the church were laid bare. And what was the mighty weapon of offence that he employed? Simply, "the sword of the Spirit which is the Word of God." He opened up the Scriptures which had been previously concealed from the people in "an unknown tongue," and invited them "to drink of the waters of life freely." Their souls were at once cheered and invigorated by the draught; the masses enthusiastically rallied round the gospel standard, on which he had inscribed the words—*Religious Liberty;* the wisest of the German princes espoused his cause: and although the Pope urged forward the mighty armies of Charles V. which slaughtered many of the free Christians, the Protestant league eventually secured the recognition of their religious liberties, and an honourable peace.

Unhappily, however, the Reformers too soon forgot the great principle which had nerved their arms and cast a glory over their cause; for they had not long burst the galling chains of Rome, until they began to frame fetters for themselves, their Protestant brethren, and succeeding generations. With de-

plorable folly, they drew up Articles and Confessions, embodying many of the doctrines of Rome, in the vain hope that they should gain converts by keeping as closely as possible to the views of the elder church. Instead of Transubstantiation, they gave Consubstantiation; and as a counterpoise to the attainment of heaven through Confession and Absolution, they supplied the still easier plan of "Justification by faith *alone*" —although the Apostle emphatically declares, that "faith without works is dead—*being alone*." We can therefore, scarcely feel surprise that, from the hour in which Protestantism adopted the weapons of Popery, and began to exercise human authority in the concerns of religion, it completely lost its expansive power. From the framing of the Confession of Augsburg, and the Articles of Smalcald, it has acquired but little territorial extension over the fair regions of Europe.

In the British Isles, the Reformation commenced under circumstances the most inauspicious. Henry VIII. a monster in human form, desired to obtain the sanction of the Pope to the repudiation of his lawful queen, in order that he might marry Anna Boleyn, who was at once too virtuous to become his concubine, and too weak to refuse his polluted hand. The Pope hesitated to comply with his request; and the imperious monarch, on whom he had just conferred the title of "Defender of the Faith" for maintaining the "Seven Sacraments" of the Church of Rome, cast off the papal authority, and declared himself the Head of the Church of England. No one can believe that this wretch, polluted with lust and blood, had any true regard for religion of any kind. One day, he persecuted Protestants because they denied the doctrines of Popery; and the next, he slaughtered Romanists because they denied his own supremacy over the church. A Protestant, he certainly was not; yet the Protestants hailed his opposition to Rome as auspicious to their views; and on Henry's death, they commenced the real work of the Reformation under Edward VI. During the short reign of that young and virtuous king, Archbishop Cranmer considerably advanced the cause of the Reformation; but when his sister Mary ascended the throne, Cranmer, with several other Protestant bishops, was burned at the stake, and Romanism resumed its ancient authority. At the end of five years the sceptre fell into the hands of Elizabeth—a genuine daughter of the Eighth Henry. Circumstances had connected her with the party of the Reformation; but she determined that the Articles, Creeds, and Liturgies of the Church of England should grate as little as possible upon the prejudices of her Roman Catholic subjects. The doctrine of her own supremacy being fully recognized, she was not very scrupulous about minor points of faith; and consequently we

find that "The Thirty-nine Articles," framed under her auspices, are an admixture of Romanism and German Protestantism; whilst the two principal creeds of the church are entirely Romish, and the Liturgy chiefly so. In the subsequent reign of Charles I. some trifling modifications were made in the Service of the Established Church, by Archbishop Laud; but, for upwards of two hundred years, it has remained the same, in the midst of increasing light—enthralled, according to the celebrated Lord Chatham, by "Calvinistic Articles and a Popish Liturgy." The Established Church, I rejoice to admit, is not the same in many of its clergy and the great body of its people, as we find in its Prayer-book. Practically, it is a truly tolerant church, and has been advancing with the spirit of the age; but whilst its great Universities remain fettered by monkish statutes; whilst its clergy, in imitation of Rome, lay claim to Apostolic succession, and maintain that the benefit of all ordinances depends upon the sacred commission of the priests; whilst it has all the Creeds and most of the Liturgy of Rome; whilst it retains, though in some cases with an explanation, the doctrines of baptismal regeneration, confession, and absolution; whilst all these things exist, I am not at all surprised that many of her clergy and some of her laity have sought rest upon the bosom of the older and more authoritative church. In good truth, if Elizabeth had not arrested the Reformation—if she had "allowed the Word of God to have free course"—if the Church, whilst disclaiming Romish infallibility with her lips, had not, with ludicrous self-contradiction, assumed the absolute power of deciding doctrines and decreeing rites and ceremonies—or if the demand for a reform of her Public Services, made seventy-eight years ago by her most enlightened clergy, had not been spurned by George III.—if those egregious errors had not been committed, we should never have seen the heart-burnings and excitement of the days in which we live.

We need scarcely, however, be surprised that, in dark times, a Church, cradled and cramped by kings and parliaments, did not secure a perfectly vigorous constitution, and entire freedom of motion. We have seen that in later ages, and under the most auspicious circumstances, Churches created by and for the people themselves, have systematically bound themselves and their children, by galling fetters of their own forging. Look at the Church of Scotland, the child of brave old John Knox—the mother of martyrs—doubly reformed—the covenanted foe both of Popery and Prelacy: even that venerable Church, though strong in faith, and piety, and the theoretical love of liberty, has not, as regards her own members, enjoyed ten years of perfect freedom since the hour of her birth. I do

not speak of her subjection to lay-patronage—for that sprung out of her misfortunes—but of her own voluntary subjection to creeds of man's device—of her bowing her neck, first to the yoke of "The Scottish Confession," and, finally, to "The Westminster Confession of Faith," composed in London, upwards of two hundred years ago, by a heterogeneous conclave of laymen and divines, who determined by votes and by majorities, what was thenceforward to be the true faith of Britain, through all generations! Is it not amazing, that men who secured liberty of conscience for themselves, by the most heroic sacrifices and toils, should have employed their hands, the moment they placed their swords in the scabbard, in forging mental chains for their children, and their children's children! They had, themselves, grown wiser than their ancestors, and broken the double yoke of Popery and Prelacy; but with a practical assumption of infallibility, as genuine as ever emanated from the gates of Rome, they averred that they had found the *entire* truth, and that all coming generations should bow down and worship the human idol which they had set up! What a wonderful creature is man—so impatient of subjection, and yet so anxious to bring not only the actions, but the very souls of others under his own dominion!

In the great church, founded some hundred years ago by the good and wise John Wesley, who so sternly repudiated Calvinism, we have a perfect illustration of the same spirit in man. Thousands of chapels have sprung up over the land, through the almost unexampled zeal and liberality of the laity; and yet I have been informed, and believe, that the Trust Deeds of every chapel in the kingdom are vested solely in "The Conference:" a clerical assembly, in which the people have neither voice nor control. And farther still: this Conference fixes the preachers who are to minister in the several circuits and churches, with a will as absolute as any bishop of either Rome or England! So little freer are modern churches created by the people than the earlier creations of popes and kings!

To one other Church alone shall I allude—a church glorious in its principle, wonderful in its energies, noble in its sacrifices. You already anticipate that I mean "The Free Kirk of Scotland." History supplies, in recent times at least, no example of a zeal more devoted, a perseverance more sustained, or a faithfulness more unswerving, than the worthy people of that young church so abundantly manifested, in breaking the yoke of patronage, and vindicating their Christian right freely to elect their own pastors and teachers, before God and man. And were anything wanting to prove their high sincerity, it would be found in the honourable fact, that, in a country whose inhabitants are proverbially careful in temporal con-

cerns, they have come forward in support of their ministers, their churches, and their educational establishments, with a self-sacrificing liberality unequalled in the history of the world. But here I must pause in my approbation; for here, I lament to say, they have stopped in their great career. Like the young man in the gospel, "there is yet one thing which they lack." They have broken the yoke of patronage which galled their shoulders in relation to the choice of particular men as their ministers; but they have to shatter, ere they shall be truly entitled to the appellation of "*Free*," the far more oppressive yoke of human creeds and church authority which gall the conscience. As matters now stand, were an entire congregation to elect a minister who refused to sign the Westminster Confession, he would not be ordained, although he should be ready to sign his unfeigned assent and consent to every word of the Bible. Freedom, therefore, in the minor concerns of patronage is a comparatively small thing, whilst in the paramount concern of religious doctrine they are still practically enthralled. I nevertheless look towards them with sincere respect and high hope. They have got "the root of the matter:" they have asserted a great principle: and as the glorious "pilgrim fathers," who, nearly two centuries ago, upon "the wild New England shores," sought "freedom to worship God." and, stern Calvinists as they were, became, through their love of liberty, the forefathers of all the Unitarian congregations that now cluster over America—so I confidently calculate that this generation in Scotland, having thrown off the trammels of lay patronage, the next will cast aside the shackles of the clergy.

Be it remembered, in what I have now said of the Protestant churches, I designed to cast no reflection upon their peculiar doctrines. I have spoken merely of the element of Romanism—the principle of human authority that is in them all; and I solemnly declare my conviction, that until those churches shall have become practically as well as nominally free—until they shall have made the Bible the only rule of faith, and every man's own conscience the judge of that rule. Popery will make incessant inroads upon their territories.

And, after all, brethren, what has resulted from those organizations of men named Churches, each calling itself the *only* true church; applying the word church whensoever it occurs in the New Testament exclusively to itself, and indecently denouncing all others as the enemies of God and Christ? The results have been most deplorable. Men who are bound, as the followers of Jesus, "to love one another, and to do good to one another," have been separated into different camps, where they are trained by their respective leaders to hate one

another, and to be ready, on a given signal, to rush upon each other in deadly conflict. Churches make good sectarians but bad Christians; and, in recruiting for their different armies, instead of honestly rebuking sin, every art of mean popularity is usually employed: passions are fostered, prejudices are soothed, and easy ways of attaining heaven are placed in competition.

In truth, brethren, men's conduct in relation to religion is altogether inexplicable. We glory in progress in all human affairs. We investigate God's natural laws; we rejoice in the wonderful progress of arts, and science, and commerce, and legislation; we are proud to think that in a few months the capital of our empire will see the industrial productions of all nations brought together in peaceful competition; we glory in the thought that steam, electricity, and the free interchange of products are rapidly uniting the nations of the earth. Amidst the blaze of light which surrounds us we look back in pity upon the darkness of former times. But, in religion, the Churches are busily persuading men, that the greater the darkness the greater is the safety—that to close the eyes is the surest way to see clearly—that to crawl back into caves and dungeons is the only true sanctity; and it is shocking to see how many prostrate their understandings and their manhood before ministers whose opinions they would despise in the meanest concern of life. It is in their souls' affairs, in their highest interest alone, that men would thus submit to be blind-led. In business, in education, in pleasures, they are acute, self-reliant, and active. They would not trust their manufactures, their trade, or their agriculture to a mere theory, or to the irresponsible management of others: but the eternal interest of themselves and their children they hand over to any self-sufficient pretender who *says* that he belongs to the true church, and possesses "the keys of the kingdom of heaven."

Amongst all the evils of Church authority none are more striking than its tendency to produce insincerity amongst the clergy, and infidelity amongst the people. I bring no sweeping charge against the ministers of any Church; for, in all Churches, I am sure, there are multitudes of truly honest men: but, I speak of the *tendency* of Creeds. They may keep a conscientious man out of a church; but they form an admirable cloak for a knave. And so far from producing uniformity of *belief*, even in the same Church, they merely produce uniformity of *profession*. In the Established Church, at this moment, there are three distinct parties under one Creed; and, I greatly fear, that if the whole truth were known, some other great Churches are not at all in a more harmonious condition. That the natural tendency of *fixed* Creeds in an *advancing* age is to

produce entire unbelief, no one, I think, could venture to deny. The masses see Christianity in Creeds, as men represent it, not as Jesus gave it; and, consequently, too many of them turn from the Gospel, because they do not like the Church. This melancholy truth is forcibly illustrated in the spreading infidelity of Italy, France, Scotland, and England.

But even amongst those who are sincere Christians, Creeds have frequently, in my estimation, a pernicious influence, inasmuch as they tend to exalt faith at the expense of morals. Thousands, I sincerely believe, consider themselves perfectly secure in belonging to a true Church, and attending upon its ordinances, whilst they are the slaves of their lusts and passions. Countless thousands believe that, through the influence of their Creed and Church, they may obtain an entrance into heaven, with less anxiety and toil than would secure the humblest comforts of earth.

Seeing, therefore, not merely the great public evils which Authoritative Creeds have produced in the world, but likewise their pernicious effects in the ordinary walks of life, it becomes a serious question whether men, by attempting to enforce uniformity of faith, be not fighting against God. No man, assuredly, can make his own belief. It is a thing of parentage, country, education, constitutional temperament, and countless other things, over which, in general, he has no control. But all those circumstances are of God's arrangement—whence, I infer, that He never designed us to be entirely of one opinion. I cannot, therefore, believe that the disputed doctrines of Churches, about which Creeds are chiefly conversant, can be what Churches call them—the fundamental and essential doctrines of religion. Were they so, a wise and benevolent God would not have permitted them to be matters of debate. On the contrary, he would have revealed them as clearly as the sun in the firmament of heaven.

Yet all these truisms have been so neglected by the great Churches of the world that they impiously condemn each other; and, if they speak the truth, no human being shall see the salvation of the Lord. According to our Roman Catholic brethren, none who are not within the pale of the True Church—that is, their Church—can be saved. In that case, some 800 million of heathens and heretics must go down to everlasting destruction. According to certain Protestants, the religion of Romanists is "damnable and idolatrous;" and in this case, the remaining 200 millions of God's children must be everlastingly miserable! "Who, then, can be saved?" None; if the Creeds be true. And yet, under the influence of theological systems, even kind-hearted men speak as complacently of the everlasting perdition of their fellow creatures, as they would do of the ordi-

nary concerns of life! If these sad views be true, then the Son of God, "who tasted death for *every* man," must have died in vain—then "the many mansions of his Father's house" must have been made in vain—then Jesus will not come and receive his followers unto himself as he has promised; but sitting upon the throne in judgment, he will calmly doom the souls for which he died to everlasting burnings! Blessed be God, men are not to judge one another; at least, in the world to come! We turn, therefore, with joy from men's dark Creeds to the bright pages of God's eternal Word. On those pages we read, as if written with a sunbeam, "The Lord is good unto all, and his tender mercies are over all his other works: I will not chide continually, neither will I keep mine anger for ever: The souls that I have formed shall find a refuge in my grace."

Now, my brethren, I should greatly deprecate any thing which would give to the Roman Catholic Church any undue or factitious influence, because she first planned and set in motion all that terrible machinery of creeds, and anathemas, and persecutions, to which I have adverted; and because, in the proud assumption of infallibility, her adherents declare that "she is unchanged and unchangeable." A church with such claims and pretensions is in her very nature aggressive and dangerous. Through all forms, and under all aspects, she steadily pursues one end—self-aggrandizement and power: so much so, that if we can believe his nearest relative, who lived in his home and partook of his counsel, the late Roman Catholic Primate of all Ireland—a man whom I loved as a friend, whom I valued as a brother, whom we all esteemed as a liberal citizen and exemplary minister of religion—that man walked amongst us for long years in a vain show. I solemnly declare that this revelation, which, considering its source, it is as difficult to discredit as to believe, smote me like a blow on the heart. I asked myself, on reading such a wonderful defence of the late Primate's Orthodoxy at the expense of his sincerity, whom can we trust, if this be true?

This sad tale, I freely confess, has rendered me less disinclined to state my views with regard to what has been termed "the Papal Aggression;" but before entering upon that theme, I must preface my remarks with a few words in reference to myself. In order to leave my mind unbiassed, I have entirely abstained from reading any Sermon upon the subject; and, indeed, almost all speeches and newspaper articles. In relation to what I am about to say, I have not communicated my views to any individual; nor is any minister or layman of my Church to be held in the slightest degree responsible for my opinions. In relation to my Roman Catholic brethren, I am sure they will do me the justice to admit that in my Church, in England,

and at home, on every reasonable opportunity, I fearlessly advocated their just rights as citizens, when to do so brought no popularity, and, as I well know, incurred much sacrifice. I cheerfully acknowledge, that by every means in their power, and on every fitting occasion, my Roman Catholic countrymen of this district generously reciprocated my feelings; and although both myself and my religion have been repeatedly and falsely abused by southern priests, I ascribe no participation in their sentiments to those with whom I have always lived on terms of sincere good-will: and I heartily trust, that what I may consider it my duty now to say, will not disturb our ancient amity.

To understand the feelings awakened in my breast and that of many others, by the recent conduct of the Bishop of Rome, some preliminary remarks may not be inappropriate.

Previously to the year 1829, the Roman Catholics of Britain and Ireland laboured under grievous wrongs; but, in that year, the two Houses of Parliament, although exclusively Protestant, passed, by very great majorities, an Act of Emancipation, full, liberal, and satisfactory. That Act has, ever since, been carried out by every Whig Government in a just and manly spirit. Roman Catholics have enjoyed their full share —at least one half—of all public offices, honours, and emoluments. On the Judgment-seat—in the Board of Education—and in all public trusts, they stand upon a perfect equality with their Protestant fellow-subjects. In Ireland, where Roman Catholics so much predominate in numbers, their bishops are not merely allowed titles of distinction, but take precedence of the ancient nobility of the land. For the education, mainly, of their working classes, a liberal system of National Education has been established: for the education of their clergy, the College of Maynooth, besides large sums expended in buildings, enjoys a grant of £30,000 a-year: and chiefly to educate their middle classes, the Queen's Colleges have lately been erected. Now, I do not say that these things demand a return of gratitude, but I do think they ought to have produced, at least, a reciprocity of kind feeling. What then *has been* the return? Why, the heaping of every foul epithet upon the Whigs, by their clergy and their press—the base abuse of the entire English people as murderers, immediately after sending some Eight Millions of money to feed our starving poor—the almost unanimous cry of priests and people for Repeal—and, above all, the decision of their bishops, at Thurles, in opposition to the Queen's Colleges, although every guarantee has been given against tampering with the religious opinions of any sect of students. This cannot be glossed over as a religious question: it is entirely secular; for every man in the community is in-

terested in the proper education of Roman Catholics. And how was this assault upon education—this insult to our Parliament and Sovereign—brought about? Why, the Pope of Rome, a man abhorred by his own subjects and by all Italy—a miserable man who invited a French army to batter down "the Eternal City," and butcher his own children—a man kept upon the chair of Peter by infidel soldiers—this man, in defiance of the Irish clergy, sent over Dr. Cullen to rule the church, and to destroy the New Colleges, if he should not be permitted to rule them!

Can any one be surprised that the assumption of such a man at such a time, to parcel out the whole of England, as a fief of Rome, to speak of it as a heathen land, and to establish a complete Hierarchy, under one of his own privy-councillors, called a Cardinal—can any one be astonished that such proceedings awakened almost universal indignation in England? Not even a hint had been given of such an assault, until the pope's presumptuous Rescript, and Dr. Wiseman's offensive Manifesto from "the Flaminian Gate," astonished the British people.

But, says Dr. Wiseman, this was essential to the proper observance of our religion; and some of our ultra-liberals have echoed him. This, however, is mere pretence; for they had long enjoyed their chapels and possessed their bishops without molestation. A man may call it an infringement of his religious liberty to prevent him from acting upon any plea which he may put forward; but others have a right to examine his plea, and not permit themselves to be disturbed by his assumptions and innovations.

But, it has been alleged, that a "papal Hierarchy is necessary to introduce the Canon Law of the church." Very likely; and for that reason in particular I strenuously object to it. I know a little of the Canon Law; and I don't like it, because it is a dark and persecuting law framed by wicked Councils. It would authorize, among other things, if I mistake not, the dethroning of heretical princes; and, I think, we are not disposed, just now, to part with our wise, humane, and admirable Queen. I have no quarrel with her supremacy over the Established Church, so long as she does not interfere with my own.

But it is alleged to be merely a question of Romish discipline; and what is there in a name? Besides, do not the members of other churches adopt what names they please? Yes; but the other parties are British subjects, under British control; whilst here, a foreign prince, without permission, appoints his own Servant, and might appoint a paid agent of Austria or Russia, to sow disaffection in the realm. And, if there be nothing in names, why have they taken them? No one knows better than Dr. Wiseman the magic of a name. Names rule the world.

How many glorious men have died at the stake, unpitied, under the hateful name of *heretics!* How many cruel wretches have basked in the sunshine of the world, because they were *orthodox!* Believe me, names and trappings have mighty charms both for the high and low vulgar.

"A saint in crape is twice a saint in lawn."

But no subjects bear more "faithful allegiance" than Dr. Wiseman and his colleagues. I do not dispute it: but still they have a double allegiance; and two masters cannot be well served at the same time. Besides, Popes, ere now, have absolved whole kingdoms from their allegiance; and if in a dispute with some Roman Catholic power, the Pope should throw his weight into the scale against Britain, does any sane man doubt the part which bishops and cardinals of foreign appointment would play? The line between religious and political allegiance is not easily drawn; for, as we see in Ireland, religion insensibly influences politics; and, considering the genius of Catholicism, I should not blame a Roman Catholic prelate for adhering to his church.

With all these difficulties, however, I should heartily deprecate any interference with the full and free exercise of Roman Catholic worship. Let them have a fair field, but no foreign aid—at least without our permission. In France, Austria, and Sardinia, which are Roman Catholic countries, no bishop is appointed without the sanction of the government; and surely a Protestant State ought not to exercise less authority.

For all the religious bigotry that has been awakened, the Pope and his ambitious Servant are to be blamed; and in any other country except England, I should dread some curtailment of liberty from the prevailing excitement. But the English are a just and noble people, deeply imbued with the love of civil and religious freedom, and they will not do wrong because others may have offended.

On the whole, I am quite persuaded that permanent good will result from temporary evil. Christians must come back to first principles; and I cannot avoid rejoicing to behold universities, and counties, and towns, in their Addresses, and the Queen in her judicious Replies, enunciating the very same principles for which I have been contending for the last twenty-three years. In truth there is no neutral ground between an infallible Church, resting on human authority, and a Scriptural Church entirely free. The Established Church cannot fight Rome with her own weapons on her own field—she must take up ground in advance: and as I never had any hostility to that

Church, I should rejoice to see her raising aloft in her powerful arm, the glorious standard of Religious Liberty.

As regards the position of my own Church in these times, I am quite satisfied. We care not that a Cardinal displayed his tinsel robes in every parish. He could make no impression upon those "who are built upon the foundation of the Prophets and Apostles, Christ himself being the chief corner-stone."

Believe me, brethren, I see no man through the medium of my creed, and I view no man merely in his own. If he be a kind friend, a good neighbour, and a worthy member of society, whether he be Catholic or Protestant, I am ready to give him the esteem of my mind and the affection of my heart. And as I can live in the bonds of mutual good-will, in this world, with my brethren of every church, I bless God for the cheering belief that I shall meet "great multitudes of every nation, and kindred, and tongue, and people," and of every sect and party—when the redeemed of the Lord shall stand before the throne, with palms in their hands as emblems of victory, and clothed in white robes as emblems of purity; and when all voices shall raise the one great anthem of praise—"Glory be unto Him that sitteth upon the throne, and unto the Lamb for ever and for ever!"

AMEN.

PUSEYISM:

A LECTURE FOR THE TIMES:

DELIVERED IN

THE MUSIC HALL, BELFAST,

ON THE EVENING OF WEDNESDAY, JAN. 29, 1851,

BY

THE REV. JOHN PORTER.

AND PUBLISHED BY REQUEST OF THE COMMITTEE OF THE BELFAST UNITARIAN SOCIETY.

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1851.

PUSEYISM:

A LECTURE FOR THE TIMES.

GALATIANS v. 1.

"Stand fast, therefore, in the liberty wherewith Christ hath made us free, and be not again entangled with the yoke of bondage."

PUSEYISM—the subject to which I would this evening request your attention, is a system which appears to me deeply to affect man's religious rights: a system which aims at the total subversion of his Christian freedom; a system, which by the power it confers upon the clergy, would bring back upon him the tyrannical authority of the dark ages, and reduce him to a state of abject spiritual bondage.

This system it is the duty of all Protestants to contend against earnestly. For what is a man who is debarred from the free exercise of his mental powers, and the free expression of his opinions? A slave. And, especially, what is he if debarred from free thought on the high subjects which religion brings before him? Doubly a slave.

I am a Protestant, not on account of many of its dogmas, but because I love freedom, and delight in the privileges with which freedom has invested me. I am a Protestant, because I hate tyranny over the conscience. I do not say, that Protestants have always acted well, or consistently—for I believe they have often done the reverse; but with all their wanderings and errors, they have my sympathy and regard, while they maintain the fundamental principles of the Reformation, "the sufficiency of Scripture, and

the right of private judgment." And it is for this reason: because my sympathies are moved towards them, and not from any personal or party considerations, that I now come forward to express my sentiments on a subject which greatly agitates the public mind.

We have had extraordinary excitement in this kingdom about certain ecclesiastical appointments of the Pope; yet, if you except the manner of making these appointments—I mean the very offensive tone of the Pope's rescript, and the bombastic insolence of Cardinal Wiseman's letter from the Flaminian Gate, and the insult undoubtedly offered by both parties to our Queen and Parliament, what harm, after all, has been done? Our lives, our properties, our liberty, our religion, are untouched. And what has the Roman Pontiff gained by his assumption? Not one foot of ground in England. No! but he has embittered his old enemies, excited the neutral, cooled the friendly, and driven back not a few who were journeying to Rome. The real power of these new-made Romish bishops has in no degree been increased, nor the members of their church augmented; and, in fact, so far from its being a prudent and politic act, his holiness could not have done anything more imprudent or impolitic. Indeed, so obvious is this to my own mind, that I have always ascribed these English appointments to Austria, rather than to the Pope; because Austria has long hated England for her sympathy to the Hungarians, and might, by a stroke of policy, have urged the measure as a sure means of dividing the population of this empire, and by opening wounds that were beginning to heal, and by exciting a sectarian and party spirit in the people, have sought to weaken the national power through such unhappy divisions.

But, whatever may have been the cause, or motive, which induced his holiness to confer honours and territorial titles on Dr. Wiseman and others, this much is certain, that, as yet, the Church of England has suffered no injury; but, on the contrary, has been, in some respects, a gainer; whilst for the Dissenters, they have expressed no alarm—uttered no complaint; and, I believe, feel perfectly indifferent about the affair.

The Church of England, I believe, is not in danger directly from Rome; but she may be from another quarter. Oxford is a name that should sound more ominously than Rome in a Churchman's ears; and the professors of that university—to whom the education of the future ministers of the Church is entrusted—should be regarded with greater dread than the entire college of cardinals.

This, then, is the quarter to which the people of England, at present, should direct their most anxious attention; for it is within the Church, and not beyond its pale, that the great danger exists. The enemy is within the camp, possesses the citadel, and commands the batteries. A subtle, vigilant, enterprising enemy, these Puseyites are; and upon their victory or overthrow depends the Established Church of England.

And now, you will ask, who, and what, are the Puseyites? What is the nature of their system? This is the thing I wish to show you: and I will do so with all possible brevity, and I hope clearly and candidly.

Dr. Pusey, the Regius Professor of Hebrew in the University of Oxford—a man of distinguished literary attainments, is the father of this party. In the year 1833, he formed an association at the University, for the express purpose of reviving, through the publication of "Tracts for the Times," certain doctrines, which they alleged to be the true doctrines of the Established Church, though for a long time not sufficiently enforced by its ministers. They appear to have been dissatisfied at the spread of what have been styled Evangelical principles, both among the clergy and laity of their communion; and therefore, one great object of the writers of these tracts, is to raise up an impassible barrier between them and the entire body of Dissenters. This great and influential body, the Tractarians assert not to be Christians at all, and their spiritual teachers to be no true Christian ministers. A prelatic church, they declared to be the only true one, and all others false, as a matter of course. Hear how Mr. Palmer (one of these writers), expresses his sentiments on the "various sects of dissent:"—

"Of these communities, whether collectively or indivi-

dually considered, I affirm that they are no part of the Church of Christ. Their separation from the Church of England was founded, not only in schism, but in heresy: and this being the case, they could not have been any part of the church, nor were they capable of forming Christian churches."

Nor is the Scottish Church less obnoxious to Mr. Palmer, than the English Dissenting communities. "The Presbyterian establishment," he observes, "being founded in schism, and destitute of an apostolical ministry, forms no part of the visible Church of Christ."

He does not confine himself to the Scottish establishment, but thus, in the coolest manner, states his farther convictions:—"With regard to all the other sects in Scotland, which have seceded from the Presbyterian community, the same observation will apply to them all. Their predecessors (the Presbyterians) voluntarily separated themselves from the Catholic Church of Christ; and they, in departing from the Presbyterian community, have not yet returned to the true church! Consequently, (how logical is Mr. Palmer!)—consequently they form no part of the Church of Christ."

"To call ourselves Episcopalians," says the *British Critic*, of October, 1839, "is to imply that we differ from the great mass of the Dissenters mainly in church government and form. Whereas, the difference is, that we are here and they there. We in the church, and they out of it."

"Consider," says a late professor of Moral Philosophy at Oxford, "the vastness of the power claimed by the Church; a power which places it almost on a level with God himself—the power of forgiving sins, and wiping them out in baptism; the power of bringing down the Spirit of God from heaven, and incorporating it in the person of a frail and fleshly man. Think of this stupendous power, and then ask if any human being could dare to assume it without authority from God himself. If such authority has not been given, then is the Church guilty of the most frightful blasphemy that man can conceive? If it has been given, is it not a fearful thing to make light of, or dispute it?"

Again, in "Tracts for the Times," Nos. 10 and 17, we find the following assertions concerning ecclesiastical authority:—"We may be as sure that the bishop is Christ's representative, as if we saw upon his head the cloven tongue, like as of fire. The bishop rules the Church here below, as Christ rules it above." The clergy "have a commission from God Almighty, not only to preach the gospel, but to rule the Church." * * "To rule with all authority, and he that despises them, despises the apostles." Elsewhere a hope is expressed, that they may be honoured "as those who are entrusted with the keys of heaven and of hell; as the heralds of mercy; as the denouncers of woe to wicked men, and as entrusted with the awful and mysterious gift of making the bread and wine Christ's body and blood."

"I should like to know," says Froude, "why you flinch from saying, that the power of making the body and blood of Christ is vested in the successors of the apostles?" And elsewhere, in the same volume from which I quote, "I can see no other claim which the Prayer-book has on a layman's deference, as the teaching of the Church, which the Breviary and Missal have not in a far greater degree."

Dr. Pusey, in a letter to Dr. Jelf, quotes with approbation the following statement:—"It is by no means to be denied, that the elements are really changed, translated, turned, and converted into the body and blood of Christ."

In the celebrated tract, No. 90, written by Dr. Newman, he says the Bishop of Rome is head of the Catholic world, and adds, that "the authority of the Fathers of the first six Councils, and of the judgments of the Church generally; the Inspiration of the Apocrypha; the Sacramental character of Marriage, and other ordinances; the real presence in the Eucharist; and the Church's power of excommunicating kings, are all taught in the homilies."

You would naturally expect that the men who could lay claim to such awful powers, would not be over scrupulous in maintaining them. Nor are they. They unreservedly advocate persecution. They lament that the times are altered, so that "a seceder from the Church" is not now "a criminal and a malefactor" in the eye of the

law; and when persons were obliged to go to church to avoid going to jail. *British Critic*, LXIV. p. 321. "The State," says Palmer, "has a right, when necessary, to oblige the members of the Church, by temporal penalties, to submit to her ordinances, and neither to establish a different worship, nor teach different doctrines from hers. No man can forsake the Church without committing a grievous sin. The civil magistrate may reasonably restrain such men by temporal penalties, in order to prevent them from disturbing the weak brethren and troubling the Church." Newman holds the same language, and bitterly laments that the State has prevented the Church from putting down that scripture-reading, which in England has led to so much schism!

And this is Puseyism! Well did Dr. Wiseman once write of it, "that it was impossible to read the works of the Oxford divines without discovering a daily approach to our holy Church!" O! Cardinal Wiseman, where was your wisdom, if you really advised the pope to make the recent hierarchical appointments, thereby superseding these learned individuals, and taking the work out of their hands, which not all the Propaganda at Rome could accomplish half so effectually? Thousands of the clergy had embraced this system. Yes; thousands of ecclesiastics, from the lordly bishop down to the lowest dignitary. But you would intermeddle in the business, and so you have met with your reward! The clergy, who were travelling quietly towards Rome, have become alarmed—their flocks are growing distrustful of them. The very bishops are not free from suspicion; and for a season, at least, till the storm so foolishly excited has passed away, the oracle of Oxford is silent.

But let us render justice to the Puseyites, and not condemn them without a hearing. This would be wrong at any time, but particularly so at present, whilst they labour under so much odium.

Bear in memory that the professed object with which Dr. Pusey formed his association, and commenced the publication of "Tracts for the Times," was, not to alter the formularies or faith of the Church of England, but to revive its

genuine doctrines, which had been suffered to decline. And, therefore, they boldly affirm that the doctrines inculcated in the "Tracts for the Times," are the identical ones that were held by the founders of the church—by Henry VIII. and his favourite bishop, Cranmer, as well as by the great Elizabeth, and her favourite, Parker; and they challenge their accusers to confute their opinions from the Prayer-book or the Homilies.

They avow their doctrines to be akin to the Romish, but affirm that the founder of the Church never dreamed of altering the doctrines when he made the secession. He only changed the supremacy from the pope to himself; but he would, at the same time, have inflicted condign punishment on any one who impugned the Romish doctrines. This Lord John Russell himself acknowledges in his essay on the English Government. "The religion," says he, "established by Henry VIII. was so far from being the religion of Luther or Calvin, that he prided himself on maintaining the Roman Catholic faith after he had shaken off the supremacy of the pope. His ordinances, indeed, vibrated for a short time between the old and new religion, as he listened more to Cranmer or to Gardner; but the law of the Six Articles, which contains the creed he finally imposed on his people, maintains and confirms all the leading articles of the Roman Catholic belief."

They assert concerning Elizabeth, that although vain of her supremacy and resolute in maintaining it, she yet held the principal Romish doctrines, and was mainly influenced by motives of policy to support the Reformation. As one evidence of her mode of thinking, they urge her hatred towards John Knox—a hatred inspired not more by his book against female rulers, than by his criticism on the English Liturgy.

They appeal to the Book of Common Prayer, and ask where in its articles is there a distinct censure enunciated against the Roman Catholic Church, though some of its doctrines, as Purgatory and the Invocation of the Virgin and Saints, may be denied? But, on the contrary, is not this Church distinctly recognised in the nineteenth article, where a faint censure is pronounced on some of its cere-

monies and dogmas in connexion with the churches of Jerusalem, and Ephesus, and Antioch?

They ask farther, does not the Established Church of England recognise the same hierarchy as the Romans?—*i.e.* bishops, priests, and deacons? And, is not Romish Ordination a passport into any pulpit of the Establishment?—while the minister of the Kirk of Scotland, or of the General Assembly here in Ireland, or the minister of any other communion, no matter how good, or wise, or learned, is deemed disqualified and excluded?

These things are not be gainsaid: they are unanswerable. Cranmer was a Romish prelate before becoming a Protestant bishop. To him, as the fountain, do the English clergy all trace their original title of ministerial honour: and that, whatever was its worth, he obtained from Rome.

But—argues the Puseyite—farther, the Ordination of Priests is the same in both churches. Who can impart a higher gift, or confer more extraordinary power, than the English bishop, when in the ordination of a priest he lays his hand upon his head, and thus addresses him: "Receive the Holy Ghost, for the office and work of a priest in the Church of God, now committed to thee by the imposition of our hands. Whose sins thou forgivest, they are forgiven: and whose sins thou dost retain, they are retained." It would be monstrous to oppose private judgment to one thus enlightened by the Holy Ghost, and thus empowered to teach and act. Private judgment is a Protestant doctrine, but the true Church of England is not a Protestant Church; and the thirty-fourth article declares it to be unlawful, in the exercise of private judgment, to contravene any of the traditions or ceremonies of the Church, and as a thing that should be punished.

If—again argues the Puseyite—we pass from a consideration of our opinions relating to church authority, to those views of Baptism and the Lord's Supper, at which so many are offended, we can only plead in our defence that they are taught in our Catechism and set forth in our Service-book. If ever words had an express meaning, the language of the Catechism is express as to Baptismal

regeneration. Thus, when the catechumen is asked, "What is the inward and spiritual grace in baptism?" This is the answer: "A death unto sin, and a new birth unto righteousness, for being by nature the children of wrath, we are hereby [by baptismal regeneration] made the children of light."

If, again, we look into the form of baptism prescribed in the Service-book, we find the priest using the following exhortatory language after the ceremony is performed:—"Seeing now, dearly beloved brethren, that this child is *regenerate*, and grafted into the body of Christ's Church, let us give thanks for the same, &c." And, again, in the accompanying prayer: "We yield thee hearty thanks, most merciful Father! that it hath pleased thee to *regenerate* this infant with thy Holy Spirit, &c:" it is impossible to put any other construction on the language than this—that previous to baptism the infant was subject to sin—(the sin of Adam) and that, being hitherto an object of wrath, it was converted by this act into a child of grace. Baptismal Regeneration, therefore, is the plain, unmistakable teaching of the Prayer-book.

Passing on to the question of the Lord's Supper, let us see what the same authority teaches regarding this service. On the Sunday previous to Communion, the priest is required to read to his congregation the following exhortatory address:—"Dearly beloved! On —— day I purpose, through God's assistance, to administer to all such as shall be religiously and devoutly disposed, the most comfortable sacrament of the body and blood of Christ, to be by them received, &c." And in the very same address, he bids the congregation to consider "the dignity of that holy mystery." But if there be any mystery at all in the sacrament, it must consist in the commutation of the elements, and in the real presence of Jesus Christ. For there is in bread and wine nothing in the least mysterious, whilst, if the "body and blood of Jesus Christ" be verily and indeed taken by the faithful in that Ordinance, (as the Catechism teaches in conformity with the Prayer-book), then, surely, the sacrament is an awful mystery, and they who teach this doctrine act under authority. They may

be designated as Romanists, but they are faithful ministers of their Church. In fact, it is this very thing, the power of *offering the sacrifice*, which alone constitutes the priest. The Jewish teachers, or preachers, were not priests. The peculiar office of any priest (under the law), and the very thing that constitutes the priesthood, is the offering of sacrifice; and, if there be no sacrifice offered in the Lord's Supper, then is the ordination of the priesthood an unmeaning ceremony, and what the Service-book asserts regarding the Lord's Supper is not true: it is not a mystery, but simply bread and wine.

Such are the grounds on which the Tractarians or Puseyites maintain their system, and on which they found their claims of being the true expositors of the doctrines of the English Church. I have of necessity stated them briefly to you, but I do hope you will not allow the matter to rest here, but when you have time and better opportunity, inquire for yourselves to what extent their pretensions are sanctioned by the standard of their Church. For myself, I am sorry to make the confession, which in candour I am bound to do, that so far as I can judge, the Puseyites have the better of the argument, and must allow that, while the Service-book disclaims certain Romish doctrines, and advocates others that are Protestant, it is Popish as a whole. It is Popish in its views of a priesthood; Popish in the prerogatives it assigns to priests; and Popish in this, that it inculcates the great and characteristic doctrines of the Romish Church.

History shows that the secession of the Church of England from the Church of Rome was not the work of the clergy, but of the laity; and Lord Roden was perfectly correct, when at a late meeting in this town he said, that all great reforms owed their origin to the people. What else could be expected? The English clergy formed a mighty corporation, endowed with enormous wealth, and invested with enormous power. Who but a madman would suppose that they, or any men in like circumstances, would reform themselves? Nothing but stern necessity could accomplish such a result. But the public had become disgusted with their pride and tyranny, and that

awful man, Henry VIII. who placed himself at the head of the movement, coerced the clergy into a reluctant separation from Rome. But in the reign of his daughter Mary they joyfully resumed their old allegiance. From the very first, there existed in the Reformed Church of England a great and influential party which hated Protestantism, and anxiously sought an opportunity of healing the breach with Rome, and reuniting the two churches together. Of this party Laud was once the representative, as Dr. Pusey is at present; and, that you may see how closely the opinions of these men and their respective parties accord, I shall lay before you an account of the manner in which this prelate administered the Lord's Supper.

"As he approached the altar, he made five or six low bows; and, coming up to the side of it, where the bread and wine were covered, he bowed seven times. Then, after reading many prayers, he came near the bread, and gently lifting up the corner of the napkin, beheld it; and immediately letting fall the napkin, he retreated hastily a step or two, and made three low obeisances. His lordship then advanced, and having uncovered the bread, bowed three times as before: then he laid his hand on the cup, which was full of wine with a cover upon it, which having let go, he stepped back, and bowed three times towards it; and then he came near again, and lifting up the cover of the cup, looked into it; and seeing the wine, let fall the cover again, retired back, and bowed as before. Then the elements were consecrated, and the bishop having first received, gave it to some principal men in their surplices, hoods, and tippets; after which, many prayers being said, the solemnity of the consecration ended."

Now, when you consider that this ceremony was performed above two hundred years ago, in the city of London, by the Primate of all England—a man whose memory is still reverenced by many, I do think you will allow that Puseyism is of old standing, and is by no means a modern back-sliding or innovation; and I think you will admit I have some reason for apprehending that the Established Church is in more danger

of being drawn over to Romanism by the exertions of her own pastors, than by such men as Cardinal Wiseman, who, though exalted by genius, and learning, and merit, are necessarily objects of suspicion, from the position which they occupy.

What then is to be done to meet the threatening evil, or to counteract it? Shall we re-enact the penal statutes, and impose pains and penalties on all such as may profess the doctrines of the Roman Catholic Church? God forbid! God forbid that such edicts should ever disgrace our statute book! No: let the Roman Catholics enjoy all the political rights and privileges of other British subjects, and let their ministers enjoy the liberty of recommending their religion by every argument they please. We desire no persecution for conscience. Persecution is an awful crime. No! but if our Government be hearty in a zeal for Protestantism, and if the clergy and laity of the Established Church, who of late have been so energetic, be really in earnest, let them all set about the work of so amending the Prayer-book that it will henceforth be impossible for any Puseyite to do battle under its standard. It is said that Lord Ashley is aiming at such a reform. Let him have their zealous co-operation, for he will need it.

And, if it be not considered presumptuous, I would suggest, that inasmuch as all days of the year are the Lord's, and as saints are no longer worshipped by us, it would be more consistent with Protestantism and the high character of the Reformed Church of England, if the Vigils, Fasts, and Saints' days, were entirely abolished. In fact, the great bulk of the people do not understand the meaning of many of these festivals. What do they know or care about Quadrigesima Sundays and Quinquagesima Sundays—Ember days and Rogation days—the Feast of the Circumcision of Jesus Christ, or that of the Purification of the Virgin Mary—with a long list of days consecrated to the memory of saints? The Prayer-book will look more Protestant and prove equally useful without such names and titles, which are, in truth, nothing better than patches and rags of Popery.

Then, it is worthy of consideration, whether the three creeds ought to be retained, inasmuch as they are contradictory of each other. The Nicene contradictory of the Apostles' Creed, and the Athanasian contradictory of both: nor pausing even here, but flatly contradicting itself.

The Thirty-nine Articles, too, might properly undergo some revision, so that no person might be able to say, as some have done, that none but fools or knaves could sign them. If something like this were effected, and the Book of Common Prayer purged of its Popery, Puseyism would speedily decline, and the Established Church of England assume her proper place and character, as the bulwark of the Reformation, the pride and glory of the land.

But who will undertake the task, and be the instrument of this new reform? Will the Bishop of London, who feels so indignant at the appointment of Cardinal Wiseman, put his hand to such a work?—or the Bishop of Exeter?—or the multitude of Ecclesiastics and Professors, whose bias and desire are so strongly suspected? No: they will oppose all reform! The Queen and Parliament have the power; but, if not urged forward by the great body of the people, such a change cannot be anticipated.

Yet some reform of the Church is indispensable to its integrity. Let matters continue as they are and it will soon be rent asunder. That portion which would bring it back to its original state, and which holds up Laud as the model bishop, or, as one of their poets styles him—

> "Martyred bishop, holiest man,
> Laud! our England's Cyprian."

That portion of the Church will make nearer and nearer approaches to the great Roman Catholic body, and ultimately merge into it; while the evangelical party will daily draw nearer to the Dissenters, and make common cause with them in upholding the great principles of Protestantism—the sufficiency of Scripture, and the right of private judgment.

Such would appear to be the opinion of Dr. Blomfield,

Bishop of London: for, on the occasion of answering one of the numerous addresses lately presented to him, he said that while the aggressive spirit of the Roman Catholic Church was to be apprehended, he thought he could discern, in an opposite quarter, still greater danger to the Church of England. In short, it was in Germany not Rome, in the chair of Luther, and not the throne of Peter, that the great danger lurked; and he professed the greatest apprehension of German rationalism and infidelity—the meaning of which I take to be simply this, that there is much probability the English laity will begin to look suspiciously at some things they used to take for granted, and question, doubtingly, various portions of the Liturgy and Articles, and possibly wander on, from heresy to heresy, until they whisper a doubt whether his lordship's own services to his fellow creatures were not rather dearly purchased at the cost of not less than one million sterling!

Reason! Infidelity!—aye, these are the walls behind which priestcraft covers itself:—rather let me say, these are the bolts she would hurl against her enemies. If you reason where priests forbid, be well assured they have something to hide which they fear you may discover; and because you disobey their will, and follow out your investigations to their legitimate conclusions, therefore you are infidel and in damnable error!

But the day for such priestly assumption is on the wane. Men will not continue to receive every doctrine on credit. They are reading much, and reflecting much on questions that affect their interests; and well am I persuaded, that the better they are informed the more shall they be satisfied that reason and infidelity have no relationship, but, on the contrary, are deadly enemies; that faith founds her throne on reason most securely; that the most enlightened of men were amongst the most faithful of Christians; and confess, that Bacon, and Locke, and Newton, and Milton were as far from the confines of infidelity as from the abodes of superstition.

Cultivated reason, or, in other words, enlightened public opinion, is the very thing we need. The walls, and

towers, and battlements of corruption would fall before it. It would reform the Church and the Universities. It would reform the bishops themselves, by diminishing those enormous revenues, which unfit them for a successful discharge of their duties; and it would reform the clergy generally, by putting an entire stop to simony, and the buying and selling of parishes and church livings. These things it would do, and will do when farther advanced.

Protestantism—not mock, but real Protestantism—I verily believe, is not in danger. It has rooted itself too deep, and spread too wide, to be easily extirpated. There may be, in many quarters, conversions from the ranks of its nominal friends; but so far as I am myself acquainted with such converts, they are not of a kind to confer power or dignity on a great party, whilst in the old Catholic states of Europe, a veneration for the priesthood is clearly on the decline, together with a respect for the ceremonies and dogmas of the Church. No traveller through Germany can fail being struck with this circumstance. It is only four or five years since Mr. Rongè caused a schism in the German Roman Catholic Church, and founded numerous congregations of Reformed Catholics, who are ministered to by men who had been educated for the priesthood. I was present, last summer, when several young persons were confirmed, and the Lord's Supper administered to a numerous congregation. At least four hundred persons were in attendance, of very respectable appearance, all of whom had ceased to be Roman Catholics, and their clergyman was a reformed priest.

Even in Rome Protestant works are sought for and secretly read; and I have heard from authority on which I think I may depend, that many are favourably disposed towards Protestantism, but they are crushed under the iron heel of despotism, and dare not express their unbiassed sentiments. Thirty-six thousand Roman citizens have been driven into banishment since the Pope's return; and now—Oh! shame and cruel mockery!—the Vicar of Jesus Christ—the representative of Him "who went about doing good!"—sits in his blood-stained throne,

guarded by foreign bayonets! Yes, sits in that blood-stained throne, doubly infamous, as the slave of France and the tyrant of Rome!

There is no fear for Protestantism! that which takes the Bible for its only creed, and leaves conscience free. In certain quarters it may, through a variety of causes, suffer a decline: but this system has within it a principle of undying life, and its progress in the world will keep pace with knowledge and civilization. It is the enemy of superstition and the advocate of mental freedom: the foe of priestcraft, but the friend of man.

Ages have passed, and generations of men followed one another, in succession to the tomb, since the day when Martin Luther, that man of lion heart and noble ambition—that man of superhuman courage and of imperishable fame—standing in the streets of Wittenburg, flung into the flames the papal bull, and called upon the people to arouse themselves out of their slumbers, and after the long sleep of ages, to contemplate the new light that had begun to dawn! Yes! ages have rolled by, and generations of men have left the earth, but that glorious cause which Luther preached, still lives. It has won for itself in America a new world; and for all its partial losses, is sound at heart; while the ancient faith, the religion of the middle age, is exhibiting symptoms of weakness, and hastening to its fall.

There is no fear for the Protestant cause! Rather let that cause be doubted which holds up mysteries and false miracles, and idle tales, as articles of faith, and which exhibits old coats, and bones, and bits of wood and iron, as sacred relics; and crowns statues of the Virgin with golden diadems, because of their *miraculously* rolling eyes, and pays honour to pictures of the Saviour, which also have the *miraculous* power of distilling blood from the wounded limbs. Let that system be distrusted which would avail itself of such arguments and assistance. But what can Protestantism apprehend, which courts investigation?—a system whose throne is built on knowledge, whose temple is the soul, and whose God is life, light, and truth?

Hail to thee, then, thou spirit of fearless, free inquiry! Hail to thee, spirit of freedom! Come to us whence you may—from Germany or the Pole! we bid thee welcome! for our safety is in our liberty, and thou wilt make us free!

Perish every system that would make man a vassal and a slave! Perish superstition! Live freedom! Raise high the ensign of Religious Liberty, under whose glorious drapery your forefathers, in other days, nobly contended! Oh, raise it high, and bear it manfully, that you may not disgrace their memory and their name! Let not the sacred legacy of religious freedom, which they conquered for you, be lost through supineness or lukewarm indifference; but let it in all its integrity be transmitted to other generations who will bless you for the gift. And so long as you retain the power of thought or action, "Stand fast in the liberty wherewith Christ hath made us free."

LECTURE FOR THE TIMES:

DELIVERED

IN THE MUSIC HALL, BELFAST,

ON THE EVENING OF WEDNESDAY, FEB. 5, 1851,

BY

THE REV. J. C. LEDLIE, D.D.

AND PUBLISHED AT THE REQUEST OF MANY OF THOSE WHO HEARD IT.

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LECTURE FOR THE TIMES.

LUKE xii. 54—57.

"And he said unto the people, When ye see a cloud rise out of the west, straightway ye say, There cometh a shower; and so it is. And when ye see the south wind blow, ye say, there will be heat, and it cometh to pass. Ye hypocrites, ye can discern the face of the sky, and of the earth; but how is it that ye do not discern this time? Yea, and why even of yourselves judge ye not what is right?"

It is perhaps scarcely necessary for me to observe, that from this portion of the teaching of our divine master we are not by any means to conclude that he in the least disapproved of a close attention to the material world and the various interesting appearances it assumes. We have been placed here by a wise and beneficent Creator, not to pass without thought through the different stages of a brief animal existence, and then, in utter and helpless unconsciousness, to mingle with the clods of the valley. But we have been assigned a temporary residence on this beauteous earth, surrounded with unnumbered objects calculated to awaken our curiosity, to excite our admiration, to call forth our gratitude, and to occupy our minds and hearts with the most delightful and improving emotions; whilst we are thus led to contemplate, through the medium of some of his works, that glorious Being by whom they were formed; and to praise, and to bless, that goodness which has made us capable of beholding and of enjoying the delightful scene. The pursuits of science in the natural world are not only perfectly innocent, but they tend also to open and enlarge the mind—to withdraw it from what is low, and sensual, and degrading—to occupy it, in moments otherwise unemployed, with thoughts full of the most pleasing interest—and to awaken, and to cherish, some of the most amiable sensibilities implanted in the human breast. They who find enjoyment in tracing the finger of God amid the countless wonders of creation will have neither leisure nor taste for idle, unprofitable, or sinful pleasures. They have thus provided for themselves gratifications pure and rational, and that naturally blend themselves with holy thoughts and aspirations. It has been alleged by timid and not well-informed Christians, that such pursuits are dangerous, as leading men to

question some religious doctrines. It is a base compliment they pay to the faith of the Gospel, when they thus insinuate that it stands opposed to truths that have been demonstrably proved. The Scriptures do not profess to instruct us in matters of science ; and when these are referred to in them, it is in the language commonly used at the time, and agreeably to the popular notions, that alone could have been intelligible, and in which modern philosophical discoveries were not expressed nor anticipated. We have sad illustration of the ignorance and folly by which ecclesiastics were characterized on this subject in the early part of the seventeenth century. Galileo, one of the most illustrious philosophers, who made astronomical discoveries by which his name has been immortalized, fell under the severe displeasure of the Church of Rome, to which he belonged. For venturing to publish the result of his studies to the world, he was denounced as a heretic, because he affirmed that the earth moved. In those days of darkness and persecution, he was compelled to appear at Rome, and after languishing some months in the prison of the Inquisition, was condemned to renounce, in an assembly of ignorant monks, on bended knee, and with his hand upon the Gospel, the great truths which he had discovered. When he arose from his knees, provoked at himself for doing violence to his own conviction, he stamped with his foot, and exclaimed, "Yet it moves." This burst of indignant feeling was punished by an imprisonment in the cells of the Inquisition : where he was sentenced for three years to repeat, every week, the seven penitential Psalms of David, and his system was denounced as contrary to the Bible. His sentence of imprisonment was, however, commuted for banishment to the neighbourhood of Florence, where he died, a few years after. His doctrines have survived him, and have been confirmed by undoubted proof, whilst the imbecile decision of an ecclesiastical tribunal, that yet assumes infallibility, remains a sad and disgraceful memorial of ignorance and persecution. I would scarcely have referred to this act of intolerance, had not the very same spirit which led to the condemnation of Galileo been revived in modern times, and a crusade, under similar auspices, been instituted against the progress of intellectual improvement. It has been stated, and remains, I believe, as yet uncontradicted, that in a periodical, then under the superintendence of the present Roman Catholic Primate of Ireland, it was gravely propounded that this earth was stationary, and that the sun which enlightens and vivifies it, was only a globe of about six feet in diameter. These wanderings of the mind groping in darkness are calculated to awaken the feeling of pity, if they were not associated with the fact, that the same unenlightened power is even now busily at work to arrest the course of knowledge and to confine, within the narrow precincts

of conventual education those minds which are eager to advance with the elevating and improving spirit of the age.

It was not the purpose of our Saviour, in the world before us, to cast the slightest reflection upon that knowledge of the appearances of nature which the Jews, whom he addressed, had gained from experience and observation; but what he censured in them was, that they, who had shown themselves capable of marking the approaching changes in the material world, should, at the same time, be insensible or indifferent to the still more important indications of the *moral* and *religious* world; and he expressed his surprise that, on matters of such moment, of such deep and thrilling interest, they had not bestowed any serious thought. "How is it that ye do not discern this time? and why, even of yourselves, judge ye not what is right?"

It is to be regretted that mankind in general are still chargeable with this want of reflection. They are so engaged in the pursuits of life, in providing for its increasing wants, or in ministering to its pleasures—they are so busied in speculations about the concerns, and prosperity, and the chances and the changes of the world around them, that they have "no convenient season" in which to reflect on the high and noble subject of man's intellectual and moral nature—of his capabilities and his attainments—of his excitements to goodness, and of the numberless difficulties that retard his improvement.

I wish to call your attention to this subject—to the signs of the eventful times in which we live—not as regards the wonderful progress of men in science and in art, though this is undoubtedly a matter of astonishment and gratulation—not as regards the aspect of the political world, though this, too, might, in some respects, come fairly before a teacher of morality; but, confining myself, at present, to what is my more legitimate province, direct your thoughts to the state of the *religious* world, and some of the anomalies which it presents.

The two principal denominations of Christians that I purpose in this inquiry to review are, the Roman Catholic and the Protestant Episcopalian. It is not my intention, however, to discuss any of the peculiar doctrines by which these Christian sects are distinguished, but to confine myself to the influences which their respective systems have upon man's intellectual and moral nature. In doing so, I wish to premise, that whilst I conscientiously think that they have fallen into grievous errors, I would guard myself against the presumption of saying or thinking that they are not Churches of Christ, or that they do not teach the fundamental doctrines of his Gospel. The long list of enlightened, good, and holy men which each of them could produce—that have lived, and laboured, and died in their communion, and, I doubt not, are now numbered among the saints in

heaven in blessed harmony, though they may have differed upon earth—must rebuke and put to shame every exclusive and uncharitable spirit.

But, as all error is more or less prejudicial, and all truth more or less conducive to man's moral and intellectual advancement—to his highest and purest happiness—I feel myself privileged to discuss such questions with perfect freedom, provided it be done with perfect candour. The present time, too, appears to me to require and to call for the exercise of this duty, inasmuch as the assumptions that have been very confidently put forth have awakened some strong feelings of indignation, and have threatened to revive that evil spirit of bitterness which has long slumbered and slept. As the advocate of perfect freedom of thought, I am sensitive with regard to it, and should be very apprehensive of any measures that might tend to circumscribe its boundaries, or to limit our charity. In our zeal for liberty, and in our manner of defending it, there is danger lest we be hurried rashly forward, and deny to others that freedom which we claim and enjoy.

The Roman Catholic Church openly renounces the use of reason in matters of religious faith, interdicts the exercise of individual judgment, and claims implicit obedience to her decrees, as the dictates of *infallibility*. It is not necessary here to adduce evidence to prove this from the decisions of Councils, and the uniform declarations of her most distinguished writers. The matter is notoriously avowed and vindicated. She affects to stand in the relation of a parent to the whole Christian world, and, in the discharge of the parental duties, she says to all, "In the great questions of religion you owe me implicit obedience—you are not to think or inquire for yourselves—and if you presume to do so, it is at your peril, both here and hereafter." In former times, the *temporal* punishment was not a mere idle threat, but was frequently exercised, in a manner, and to an extent, that is painful to think of, and over which outraged humanity wishes to draw a veil. The improved spirit of a more enlightened age, would not now tolerate such an exercise of ecclesiastical authority, and the infallible Church, no longer armed with the sword of the civil power, must be content to employ spiritual terrors, and to fulminate decrees innocuous here, but which, we are told, will take effect in another world. These weapons she still wields with great energy and power; and, in the plenitude of her authority, demands unqualified submission, in matters of faith, from all her children. Theology, as a study, is wholly interdicted to the laity; and learning and science, wherever they might seem, to the watchful guardians of her interest, to interfere with this subject, are forbidden. Circumstances may render it expedient to be reserved or silent, or even

to suspend or to modify the assertion of authority; but the claim, however it may be temporarily in abeyance, is never abandoned, and, when a fitting opportunity presents itself, will be asserted and enforced. Some men, of more enlarged and resolute minds, amongst the people of that communion, may hesitate to submit; but the chains that bind them to the religion in which they have been brought up—the shame of abandoning an ancient faith, the faith of their fathers—the numberless ties of affection springing from it, that are wound about the heart—all unite their influence, and extort submission from the doubting and reluctant mind. With regard to the great mass of the people, trained, as they are, from their earliest years, to the most abject spiritual servitude, and to a veneration for their teachers which would place them above humanity, unconditional, unreflecting obedience, to what their Church is said to demand, becomes with them a high and sacred duty.

In accordance with this statement is the following extract from the *Tablet* newspaper of Nov. 16—the avowed organ of the Roman Catholic Church in this country :—

"The Pope professes to be the head of that Church—the Catholic Church—the Church universal—the one Church, to which all real Christians belong, and out of which there is no salvation. And, as the head of that one Catholic Church, he claims, and has claimed for many centuries, a spiritual supremacy over all baptized Christians—a supremacy utterly at variance with, and subversive of, all other forms of religion whatever, whether Greek, Nestorian, Presbyterian, Dissenting, Lutheran, Calvinistic, Prussian, Mahommedan, Buddhist, Brahminical, Cannibal, or even Anglian—a supremacy actually believed to be true, and to be from God—a supremacy which, if true, and if from God, requires spiritual obedience, spiritual subjection, spiritual dependence, on the part of all men, under very heavy penalties, to be enforced or remitted in the next world—a supremacy, therefore, which, in its own nature, now and for ever, is, and is known to be, at war with the private judgment and private fancies of all men, and all nations, that claim spiritual independence, and disclaim subjection to the Church."

In the famous decree of the late Roman Catholic Synod at Thurles, in which the Colleges, recently erected and endowed by the State, for the wise and benevolent purpose of conferring the rich blessings of an enlightened education on all who wish to receive them, without religious distinction, and freed from sectarian prejudices, are the following words :—"The statesmen who framed them were not acquainted with the inflexible nature of

our doctrines, and with the jealousy with which we are obliged to avoid everything opposed to the purity and integrity of our faith. Hence, those institutions which would have called for our profound and lasting gratitude, had they been framed in accordance with our religious tenets and principles, must now be considered as an evil of a formidable kind, against which it is our imperative duty to warn you with all the energy of our zeal, and all the weight of our authority."

Again—"Peter has spoken to us by Pius, as he spoke to the Fathers of Chalcedon by Leo, and pronounced this system of education to be fraught with grievous and intrinsic dangers to faith and morals; has declared that religion can expect nothing but loss from it, and that your Bishops should take no part in carrying it into effect. All controversy is now at an end—the judge has spoken—the question is decided. That the woes pronounced against men of scandal must fall with aggravated force on the head of the parent who, after having been solemnly warned by the authority established by Christ for his direction, thrusts his child into the furnace of danger, immolating him to the Moloch of avarice or ambition, is so obvious as to require neither proof nor illustration."

Such are the terms employed when speaking of institutions in which all reference to controversial doctrines in religion is carefully avoided, and in which it was benevolently hoped, when this root of bitterness was taken away, that ingenuous youth, of various sects, engaged together in humanizing studies, would learn to esteem and love each other, notwithstanding the differences of their respective creeds. How far this denouncement will be effective, and whether it will be made to extend to the schools of the National Education, which are obviously under the same ban, remains to be seen. It is a question yet to be decided, of great moment, whether the laity of that communion are prepared tamely to bow their necks, and submit to the yoke which their clergy would impose; and not merely to receive the *doctrines* of their religion, the rules of *faith* and *morals*, but also their *secular* knowledge, their *literary* and *scientific acquirements*, in such a manner, and to such an extent, as their priesthood may deem expedient. I have some hope in the increased and increasing intelligence of the age, and that they who reckoned on the unreflecting submission of so many intelligent creatures of God have overrated their influence. Yet am I not without my fears. When I think of the thousands who, not long since, bowed down in veneration, and believed in, the miraculous power of the "holy coat" exhibited at Treves—when I am reminded of the imposture of the images of the Virgin in Italy, moving their eyes, and looking benignantly on the crowd of stupid worshippers; and, again, in France, of the painting of

the Crucifixion, from whose wounds blood continues to exude, in answer to the invocations of a devotee—I am in doubt how far, even in this day of intellectual advancement, imposition on the one hand, and credulity on the other, may be made to extend.

The Court of Rome has reckoned on the tame acquiescence of the people of England in general, and has been deluded into a flattering hope of a great religious change rapidly approaching. From the conduct of a few ecclesiastics, who, brought up in the gloom of semi-monastic institutions, and musing in their cloisters of the times of priestly authority, now happily no more, and dreaming that they might yet be restored, have attempted to revive exploded doctrines and superstitious ceremonies; and some of them have passed over and joined the ranks of those to whom they were once bitterly opposed. The Pope has, accordingly, among the list of Cardinals, created one of Irish extraction, appointed him to be an English Archbishop, and several Roman Catholic priests to be Bishops, to form a regular hierarchy in England, and to supersede that of the Protestant Establishment. This movement in advance has caused a wonderful excitement in that country; the old cry of "*No Popery*" has been loudly raised; and there is some fear lest the true feeling of religious liberty should thereby be endangered. It must be confessed that the arrogant assumptions of the Romish Church, and its undisguised and insolent intolerance, are calculated to call forth feelings of very just indignation. It is, no doubt, no ordinary insolence that could induce an Italian Bishop, who lately fled from his own home in the disguise of a menial—who has been restored by foreign soldiery, and maintained by them in his tottering authority—to fulminate his empty thunders against Protestant England, and to depose, by idle threats, those who hold their offices by the laws of the land. As a sample of these assumptions, I will quote the expressions of a Dr. Ullathorne, who has, under the Papal bull, been made Bishop of Birmingham, delivered, I believe, on what has been called the day of his enthronization:—

"The people of England, who, for so many years, have been separated from the See of Rome, are about, from their own will, to be added to the Holy Church. I do not recollect any people on earth, but those of Great Britain, who, having rejected the religion of God, were again restored to the bosom of the Church. The hierarchy is restored, the grave is opened, and Christ is coming out."

Let us now turn our attention to the present state of the Established Church of England and Ireland, as one of the most remarkable "Signs of the Times."

You require not to be told, that the foundation of all Protestantism is the maintenance of perfect freedom of opinion, and the sufficiency of Holy Scripture as a rule of faith and conduct. If, as all professing Christians are ready to admit, the Scriptures contain a true and faithful record of the life and doctrines of Jesus, and if men are not only at *liberty*, but are *bound* in *duty*, to examine for themselves what those doctrines are, as Protestants affirm, it follows that they must look for them in the only authorized book where they have been recorded, that is, in the sacred volume of the New Testament. All other history, whether written or traditionary, is of much less authority—is no more than imperfect and secondary evidence, and cannot, therefore, supersede that which is direct and *primary*. It may be useful in illustrating what is dark, by making us acquainted with usages and facts that throw additional light upon it ; but no man, who exercises his understanding in such matters, will be satisfied with the testimony of vague and uncertain tradition, passing through a medium calculated to distort and obscure it, whilst he has it in his power to refer to the faithful record of divine truth. What wise man is there who would seek to quench the thirst of his ardent, inquiring mind at the muddy waters which, passing through many a polluted channel, have been mingled with corruption, instead of going immediately to the pure and exhaustless fountain opened up for the refreshment of his spirit in the Holy Gospel of Jesus ?

Let us here pause, and inquire how far the two principles I have stated, as the basis of Protestantism, are recognized and influential in the Anglican Church.

Although the right of private judgment was proclaimed by the early Reformers, when they used it as a weapon, and a powerful one, against those from whom they had separated, yet was it long practically denied to those who had the hardihood to separate from them. Henry VIII., in England, having renounced the authority of the Pope, assumed the reins of ecclesiastical government, and ruled, and persecuted, and burned those who differed from him in opinion, with as little hesitation as if he had caught the mantle of infallibility, and with as much fiery zeal as if he had been trained in the horrid school of the Inquisition. When this man had gone to his own place, such excessive zeal became moderated ; but it was not for a very long period, indeed (if that period has even yet arrived), that the great principle of *unbounded* freedom of thought was fully asserted and vindicated. In fact, the use of the word "*toleration*" is of itself a proof of an imperfect state of religious knowledge and religious liberty. It implies that there is something in the exercise of the principle which stands in need of apology and indulgence ; whereas it is one of the rights, as clear and

indefeasible as any which the Creator has bestowed upon us. We never talk of man being *tolerated* by his fellow-man to breathe the fresh air, and to enjoy the glorious light of heaven. Why, then, should we apply the word to that not less noble, nor less indubitable privilege of reverencing the great and blessed Author of all these gifts, in the mode which our reason and our heart approve? Toleration implies a *power* and a *right* to refuse. There may be, and there often is, in man, such an *assumption* of authority, and the weak may be, and have been, oppressed; but every principle within us disclaims such usurpation. Yet this most plain and most equitable of human rights was long withheld and rudely trampled upon. Even after the Reformation had broken some of the chains of mental slavery, it was but partially and reluctantly conceded; and still, in this most improving and improved state of the world, we find men of learning, and men holding high stations, as teachers of that religion which was designed by its holy Author to make us *free*—free alike from vice and all spiritual tyranny—presuming to question the advantage of such a privilege, and evidently willing to retain in their grasp, now feeble and relaxed, those reins of power which the increased intelligence of the age has wrested from them.

After Protestantism had been established in England, the Church was divided into two sections, known by the names of the High and Low Church parties. The most distinguished of the former, if not the founder of it, was Archbishop Laud, who, in the reign of Charles I., was conspicuous for priestly intolerance, for which he ultimately paid the forfeit of his life. It was evidently his purpose to lead back Protestant England to the religious creed she had renounced, to exalt the power of the clergy, and to enslave the people. By his directions, paintings were set up, or repaired, in the churches—the communion table was called an altar—the crucifix was placed upon it—various genuflexions were enjoined, and the dress of the officiating ministers (calling themselves priests) was made a matter of deep study. The doctrines of the real presence, or transubstantiation, auricular confession, absolution, and the efficacy of prayers for the souls of the departed, were taught and defended; and but a few more steps had to be trodden till the journey to Rome would have been completed.

With regard to his cruel and intolerant disposition, the following facts from history will, I think, be sufficient proof.

Mr. Prynne, a barrister of Lincoln's Inn, had incurred the displeasure of Laud and the High Church party, then in the ascendant, by various publications, in which their principles were attacked. In the course of his writings this zealous Puri-

tan had denounced as sinful all stage plays, and had applied to the performers many coarse and unseemly epithets. The Queen was fond of theatrical amusements, and occasionally at the palace took part in the performance. Prynne's book had been published six weeks before this took place ; yet, by a gross perversion of law and justice, his writing was represented as a libel on her Majesty. He was committed to prison by warrant from the Archbishop, and, after being confined a year, was prosecuted in that infamous court called the Star-Chamber. In vain Prynne declared that he never intended to include the Royal Family in his denouncement of players—neither justice nor mercy was ever heard within its walls. He was found guilty, of course—sentenced to be imprisoned for life—to pay a fine of £5,000 to the King—to stand in the pillory at Westminster, and have one of his ears cut off, and, after a short interval, to have the punishment repeated at Cheapside. All this savage treatment he bore with the patience of a martyr.

Another case was that of a Doctor Leighton. This man had presumed to write and publish a work entitled "Sion's Plea against Prelacy," in which he had treated the Bishops with severity. This was a crime not to be forgiven. Accordingly, he was imprisoned in Newgate, and, after a confinement of some months, brought to trial. He was found guilty, of course, and sentenced to the most cruel punishment. It is related, as characteristic of Laud, that when judgment was pronounced, this Archbishop, in a spirit which undoubtedly was not the spirit of Christ, pulled off his cap, and, holding up his hand, gave thanks to God, who had given him victory ever his enemies. And in his diary (Nov. 16, 1630), he has coolly recorded to this effect :—"Part of his sentence was executed upon him, in this manner, in the New Palace at Westminster, in term time :—1st, He was severely whipped before he was put in the pillory ; 2d, Being put in the pillory, he had one of his ears cut off ; 3d, One side of his nose was slit ; 4th, Brauded on one cheek with a red-hot iron ; and, on that day se'nnight, his sores upon his back, ears, nose, and face, not being cured, he was whipped again in Cheapside, and there had the remainder of his sentence executed upon him, by cutting off the other ear, slitting the other side of the nose, and branding the other cheek." He survived this barbarous mutilation, lay in prison ten years, and, when released by the Long Parliament, came out paralytic, blind, and deaf, and died insane. These are matters of history which cannot be gainsaid, and are amongst the acts of the Star-Chamber and High Commission Courts, which were under the influence and control of this base man, who suffered for his crimes, and is now almost canonized by the High Church party, who venerate him as a martyr. These violent and intolerant proceedings had a powerful influence in

causing that civil war which terminated in the death of the First Charles, and in the exile, for years, of his unprincipled and dissolute son. After the Restoration, Charles II., unschooled by adversity, followed the same intolerant course. In his reign, the famous, or, I should rather say, the infamous, Act of Uniformity was passed, in violation of the most solemn pledges he had given to the Dissenters, during his exile. By it, it was enacted that, "if any one shall declare or speak anything in the derogation or depraving of the Book of Common Prayer, he shall for the first offence suffer imprisonment one whole year, without bail or mainprise; and, for the second, be imprisoned during life." And by the canons of the Church it is decreed, that "whosoever shall affirm that the form of God's worship contained in the Book of Common Prayer hath anything in it repugnant to the Word of God, or that any of the Thirty-nine Articles are in *any part erroneous*, or such as may not with a good conscience be subscribed, let him be excommunicated, *ipso facto*, and not be restored till he repent, and publicly revoke his wicked errors."

Charles II., though secretly a Roman Catholic, professed the utmost zeal for Protestantism; and, as an evidence of it, passed this Act of Uniformity, by which upwards of 2,000 pious ministers, who questioned the authority of the civil power in matters of religion, were ejected from their livings, and cast upon the wide world without support. "Many hundreds of them," saith one who shared in their sufferings, "with their wives and children, had neither house nor bread; the people they left were not able to relieve them, nor durst they, if they had been able, because it would have been called a maintenance of schism or faction. Many of the ministers, being afraid to lay down their ministry, after they had been ordained to it, preached to such as would hear them, in fields and private houses, till they were apprehended and cast into jails, where many of them perished."

The scenes that were acted, too, in Scotland, during those eventful times of reckless oppression on the one hand, and of heroic resolution on the other, have formed subjects for many exciting and deeply moving tales. The faithful ministers of the Gospel, who could not bow their necks to the yoke of Episcopacy and its burdensome ceremonies, were driven by the hand of violence, armed by the civil power, from their beloved flocks and their humble homes, and sought for shelter and for peace amid the bleak and pathless wilds of their country. The people, with pious zeal, sought out their retreat, and rejoiced when, in some sequestered glen, or on the bleak mountain's side, they could listen once more to their pastor's voice, which spake to them of their duties, their trials and consolations. Yet often did the men of blood track these wanderers, and break in on their solemn meetings, and many a grassy mound, and many a

rudely-sculptured stone, amid the wilds of Scotland, recal the memory of her sufferers, and marks the spot where, in vindication of the sacred rights of conscience, they had fallen beneath the blood-stained hand of the pursuer. But they have not fallen in vain. The noble spirit of religious independence still lives amongst them ; and, differing widely as I do from many of the doctrinal opinions of the Scottish Presbyterians, I venerate that feeling which has always sustained them in opposition to mere human authority.

Charles II., who lived a profligate and a persecutor, died a Roman Catholic, and was succeeded by his brother, the wretched bigot James II. This man, having provoked beyond endurance the patience of his people by his arbitrary acts, he was driven from his throne, and the civil and religious liberties of these countries were established on a fair basis, at the Revolution.

But why, you may perhaps ask, revive such a painful subject ? Why dig up from the grave of musty records, where they should lie for ever buried, those statements that dishonour the memory of the dead, and cannot profit the living ? What have we to do in the present day with the history of Archbishop Laud and the intolerance and persecutions of the doomed race of the Stuarts ? Let them rot in cold oblivion. But, my brethren, they have been disinterred by those calling themselves their friends, and, if possible, would be revived amongst us, even in these our days of boasted enlightenment and widely spread liberality. Men, from their talents, and acquirements, and wealth, and untiring zeal, very powerful and influential, belonging to the Established Church, have for several years been using their utmost efforts to revive those doctrines and practices. They extol in unmeasured terms that Archbishop Laud whose memory the pen of the faithful historian has consigned to the reprobation of every friend to human liberty and to the progress of the human mind. They re-assert with confidence some of the most questionable doctrines of that ancient Church from which the Reformers felt themselves constrained to separate ; and, above all, they appear to regret that the arm of the civil power is not now stretched out, as in days of old, to restrain those who would otherwise depart from the established creed, and to compel submission to the established forms and ceremonies.

There is no institution in the world that places so little value on mere outward distinctions, and forms, and ceremonies, and is so complete a leveller of that pride and vanity which nestle so closely within the bosom of man, as Christianity. It is wisely and mercifully adapted to all ranks and classes in society ; but it looks with an aspect peculiarly kind upon the *lowly*, as if to sustain and comfort them beneath life's heaviest burthen. Yet, at a very early period of the history of the Church—soon after

the ascension of Jesus—disputes arose amongst the disciples about who should have the pre-eminence. The simple and purely democratical form of government which they had adopted was gradually changed; and the teachers elected by the popular voice, ere long, formed themselves into a distinct order, assumed special privileges, and began to "lord it over God's heritage, instead of being examples to the flock." This corruption of the pure Gospel became more fully developed from the inauspicious time when Christianity was taken under the guardianship of the State. The lowly presbyter was then metamorphosed into the lordly bishop, and mitred heads raised themselves proudly in the palaces of kings. It was then they adopted some of the pompous ceremonials of the Jewish and the Heathen worship; and the once plain and unassuming ministers of Christ were enrolled in a peculiar order, and, thenceforward, claimed the character of a holy priesthood. In this way, the clergy were separated from the laity, and arrogated to themselves peculiar endowments and exclusive privileges. As ignorance increased, so did the power of this order, which engrossed the learning and knowledge of the age, till the reign of superstition over the bodies and the souls of men, throughout Christendom, was unbounded. The discovery of the art of printing created a new era in the history of man. Books, which had previously been rare from their expensiveness, then multiplied, and the human mind at length awoke from its long and deep slumber. One of its first efforts was to throw off a large portion of the superincumbent mass of ecclesiastical domination. It was not, however, to be supposed that mankind, just emerging out of gross darkness, should at once be prepared fully to understand and to appreciate their newly-acquired privileges. Accordingly, we find that numbers ran into the wildest extremes, and scandalized the Protestant cause. These gross abuses, under the name of religious liberty, led serious and well-disposed reformers to frame and publish their views of Christian doctrine and duty. This was the origin and object of Confessions of Faith. They were a mere expression of the opinions of those who framed them, formed according to the light they had received, but were not intended to prevent all future inquiry, and to be thenceforward an unvarying standard of religious faith. Such an attempt would have been too gross and palpable a departure from their avowed principle—the right of private judgment. By degrees, however, this abuse followed, and the Reformers fell into the gross error of attempting to legislate for others, in matters of opinion. Bishop Burnet, in his "History of the Reformation of the Church of England," observes that, after some progress had been made in this great work, "it was thought to be a great defect that a public Confession of Faith and Doctrine

should still be wanting." To supply this defect, the Thirty-nine Articles were compiled, published, and enjoined to be subscribed. Yet, this bishop admits that "certainly our Reformation was never perfected, neither can it be, till we all come openly to acknowledge and to act upon that principle which was the only ground on which the Reformation did or could stand, viz.—that the Scriptures are the only rule of faith to Christians; and that every Christian, as he has to answer to God for his actions, and not others for him, so he is to judge for himself in matters of religion, and not others for him. Where this principle does not prevail, there Popery still prevails, though it passeth under the name of Protestantism; and till this principle does prevail, we can expect no completion of that Reformation which, as yet, can only be said to be happily begun among us."

This erecting the book of the Thirty-nine Articles, or any other mere human creed, into an unvarying standard of belief for all future times, was virtually to say, that the framers had reached the perfection of religious knowledge—that the ground was fully occupied, and there was no room for further improvement. Since that period, innumerable changes have taken place in society. Arts and sciences have progressed with a rapidity, and to an extent, that could not have been anticipated; but, according to the enactments of this law of subscription, an effectual stop has been put in the Churches that have adopted it to all progress; and the anxious inquirer, who vainly supposed that, by the Reformation, his mental slavery had been abolished and his free-born spirit emancipated, has an insurmountable barrier interposed, on whose gloomy and repulsive walls are inscribed the words, "Hitherto shall you go, but no farther."

The usual plea for this departure from the very first principle of Protestantism is, "the prevention of diversity of opinion." Let us examine this for a moment.

The attempt to promote uniformity of opinion in matters of religion has not only signally failed, wherever it has been tried, but has invariably been productive of the most afflicting, demoralizing, and disastrous effects. You may talk of imprisoning the winds, of arresting the ocean tides as they ceaselessly ebb and flow; but attempt not to set boundaries to human thought, or bring into one changeless view, one unvarying form, the endless diversities of human intelligence. The notion of attaining to complete uniformity of opinion in matters of religion, or, indeed, in anything else, is as wild and fanciful as any that ever entered into the human mind. Were it not that the heart sickens at the recital of the horrors and the miseries it has occasioned upon earth—the destruction of countless thousands of God's intelligent creatures, for a mere difference of opinion on subjects confessedly difficult—and the bitterness, and the evil thoughts and

evil purposes, it has generated in the heart, that had no opportunity of breaking forth into outward acts—it would be enough to call up a smile of derision at such miserable folly, that has been labouring so long and so hopelessly for that which is utterly unattainable. We should, doubtless, be amused, if the painful idea of the person's sanity did not disturb us, at any one entertaining the thought of moulding, by some new and ingenious process, the outward forms or the features of men, after some model of imaginary beauty and excellence. And yet such a project, wild, and visionary, and unprofitable as it must appear, would be unspeakably more practicable and less injurious than that which for ages has employed and baffled human wisdom and human power, and caused the earth to be deluged with blood—viz., the endeavour, by various plans and devices, to mould the intellectual features into a perfect resemblance of some model of imaginary worth. A moment's reflection will teach the egregious folly and impracticability of the scheme. There is such an endless variety in the capacities and powers, both intellectual and moral, of mankind, in the position they occupy, the education they receive, and the influences to which they are exposed, that uniformity of thinking is wholly unattainable; and, even could it be effected, instead of being an advantage, it would reduce this world of ours to a dull, cold, uninteresting sameness — enlightened by no gleam of brighter intelligence, warmed and animated by no burst of impassioned feeling. There is nothing uniform in nature—nothing around us or within us. No two objects in creation are in every respect alike. There are no two blades of grass that spring up beneath our feet—no two leaves of trees in the wide forests—that are the same size and shape. Diversity, then—endless and unalterable diversity—has been impressed on all His works by the great Creative Power. It is idle, therefore, for us to contend with the irreversible law of our being, and we only discover our own weakness and presumption when we set up our vain and puny imaginings in opposition to God's purposes. All this wild and mischievous dream has originated, I presume, in the no less unfounded persuasion, that He has made the belief of certain doctrines essential to the final happiness of His intelligent creatures. No doubt there are many truths of high importance to the improvement of our race, and the cultivation and the cherishing of these must powerfully influence our capabilities and our fitness for the holy enjoyments of futurity; and he who neglects or refuses to avail himself of such means of grace, diminishes his own good, and incurs a deep responsibility. But there are innumerable cases in which God, for wise and good ends, has denied the opportunity of gaining heavenly knowledge; and shall we venture to affirm that those who have thus been shut up in impenetrable

darkness (the heathen world, for example) shall yet be eternally condemned for that darkness which was to them unavoidable? God forbid! The character of the Divine Being, as He has Himself revealed it, in His works and His Word, precludes the entertaining a thought so utterly at variance with his perfection.

Let us now inquire for a little into the success of the plan devised for promoting uniformity in doctrine. And, lest I might be charged with giving too high a colouring, I shall first quote to you the language of some distinguished members of that Church on this point:—

"I apprehend," says Bishop Clayton, "any attempt towards avoiding diversity of opinion, not only to be a useless, but an impracticable scheme. I do not only doubt," continues he, "whether the compilers of the Articles, but even whether any *two thinking men*, ever agreed exactly in their opinion, not only with regard to all the Articles, but even with regard to any *one* of them."—(Quoted in *Confessional*, p. 232.)

Archdeacon Blackburn says—

"After some progress had been made in the reformation of the Church of England, it was thought to be a great defect that a public confession of faith and doctrine should still be wanting. To supply this defect, the articles of religion were compiled, published, and enjoined to be subscribed. These articles, with some alterations, which in those days passed for improvements, are still subscribed by at least one hundred of our ministers every year. That above one-fifth of this number do not subscribe or assent to these articles in one uniform sense, we have great reason to believe; and yet the avowed purpose of this general subscription is to *prevent diversity of opinions*. And, indeed, considering to what sorts of men this test is made indispensable, it is, I think, as much as can be expected if another fifth subscribe them in *any* sense but the sense that they have of wanting preferment in the Church if they should not."

It is indeed quite notorious that in *doctrinal* matters, notwithstanding their subscribing the same creeds, there is, and long has been, the greatest diversity in the Church of England. We have had lately a remarkable instance of this in the protracted controversy between the Bishop of Exeter and Mr. Gorham, on the subject of baptismal regeneration. When the divines were unable to settle the question, an appeal was made to a court of ecclesiastical law, and, the decree of that court not proving satisfactory, it was ultimately laid before the Queen in Council—the supreme head of the Church. The men learned in the law whom she called to assist her in her judgment, with characteristic pru-

dence avoided giving any opinion as to the mysterious efficacy of the ceremony, but confined themselves to this point, whether a man might be a consistent Churchman and hold or deny the doctrine of baptismal regeneration. The liturgy and the catechism seemed to teach one thing, and the articles to teach another; whilst a similar variety was found to exist in the opinions of the bishops and the other clergy. Under these circumstances, the lawyers kept clear of the difficulty by following the sage example of the good old knight, so happily described by Addison, who, when required to settle a disputed point, assuming the grave look of a judge that would not decide rashly, pronounced that "much might be said on both sides:" and, leaving it an undecided and open question, they determined that differences of opinion on this mysterious point ought not to disqualify for holding a living in the Church. I much doubt if a body of ecclesiastics would have decided the matter with so much wisdom and moderation.

I mention these facts to show, that the Thirty-nine Articles of the Established Church, and, I may add, all other human creeds and articles of faith, have signally failed in their professed object; that they have never promoted uniformity of belief; that they never can exclude any unprincipled man from gaining admission into a religious society, whilst they deter the scrupulous and conscientious, and raise an insuperable obstacle to free and honest inquiry. Without entering upon controverted questions, I would merely throw out this suggestion, that, in the great progress of men in all kinds of knowledge, it is likely that, with the additional light they now possess, they may be at least as well qualified to understand the Sacred Scriptures, and to avail themselves successfully of all other means of improvement, as those who, centuries ago, drew up articles of faith, and who have, confessedly, not long themselves emerged from the darkness of superstition.

But the introduction of subscription to human creeds was not the only error committed by the Established Church. They further dissented from the fundamental principles of Protestantism by erecting a hierarchy, who assumed the power of prescribing rites and ceremonies, and enjoining their observance, under various pains and penalties.

In the first and purest ages of the Christian Church, when the sacred footsteps of Jesus might almost have been traced, and the echoes of that voice almost heard "which spake as never man spake," the lessons of humility which He taught were still remembered, and the aspirings of guilty ambition, that would have trampled on the rights of others, were repressed. The followers of Him who "was meek and lowly in heart," and who had imbibed of His spirit, were associated with equal rights and privileges, and were ruled, not by the arbitrary command

of one, or of a few, who claimed a superiority in virtue of peculiar gifts and graces, but by the collective wisdom of the Church. The teachers of that day did not affect any special authority over the faith or conduct of those amongst whom they expounded the doctrines and enforced the precepts of Christ. They were truly, as Paul expressed it, "men of like passions with others."

By-and-by, however, the love of power, which is a deeply-seated principle in the breast, began to unfold itself, and to take advantage of that superstitious weakness to which we are naturally inclined. The presbyters, or elders, or bishops—for they all designate the same office, in the primitive meaning of the words—had been chosen by the people, and ministered in the Christian assemblies, in the same manner as men of a similar standing and office did in the synagogues of the Jews. These differed from the priesthood, inasmuch as they were not necessarily of the tribe of Levi, and were not engaged in ceremonial worship, or in the offering up of sacrifices. By the Christian dispensation, all those rites, and forms, and victims were abolished at once and for ever; and, as there were to be no more oblations, no more sprinklings, no more ablutions, no shedding of blood, no incense, so was there to be no more any peculiar order of men devoted to such duties; and all their gorgeous decorations gave place to that simple worship by which the humble and pious heart, in pouring forth its thanksgivings and prayers, performs an acceptable service; and without priest, or altar, or consecrated earth, the aspirations ascend to the throne of God, and every spot from which they are offered is holy.

When Christianity, from having been persecuted, became the religion of the State, and basked in the sunshine of imperial favour, it was judged wise and expedient to clothe it with splendid garments, and surround it with the decorations of earthly pomp. Its ministers, no longer the meek followers of Him "who had not where to lay His head," assumed to themselves state and sanctity. The lowly teacher became exalted into a spiritual director, claiming the honours of the *priesthood;* and the presbyter, who had the good fortune to be called on to discharge his duties in one of the principal cities of the empire, emerged at length from his chrysalis state, and shone forth, to the gaze and admiration of the multitude, as a *mitred bishop!* These changes, of course, were gradual, but they were the natural consequences of associating the simple faith of the Gospel with the purposes of worldly ambition.

The next step in the downward course of intellectual and moral degradation was to confer on Christian ministers a peculiar sanctity. Altars were erected in the houses of prayer; the vestments in which the teachers ministered were made after the

models of the Jewish and the heathen priesthood ; rites and ceremonies, calculated to impress the senses, were instituted, borrowed freely from the ancient superstitions ; so that it would have been difficult, if not impossible, under these gorgeous forms, to recognize any features of the simple faith of Jesus.

The clergy, to increase and perpetuate their power, then claimed to be the legitimate successors of the Apostles, and to be invested with Apostolic authority.

The Apostleship, however, was an office limited to those who were enabled, as eye and ear witnesses, to bear testimony to the resurrection of Christ ; and they had not, and could not have had, any successors beyond their own generation. It is idle, then, to allege that the gifts which they possessed, and that fitted them for the times in which they lived, and the powers which they exercised in the formation of the Church during its infancy, have been transmitted, and are yet efficacious. If it were so, let those who have received them, and on whom the Holy Spirit has fallen, give proofs of such supernatural endowments ; let them show to us, by clear and indubitable evidence, that, claiming peculiar privileges, they have likewise peculiar gifts—have a commission from heaven, attested, as it must be, by miraculous agency. It is vain to quote to us the words of Scripture with regard to Apostolic men, unless they are prepared to show, by a chain of uninterrupted evidence, that they are the true lineal successors of those holy men—that the garment of inspiration has fallen on their shoulders—that they, too, are able to work miracles, in proof of their mission—and that authority has been given them from heaven to be apostles. If any one of these qualifications be defective—if a single link in the long chain that purports to come down to us for eighteen hundred years be wanting—if they cannot show to the world any special endowment by which they can at once be distinguished from their fellow-disciples—gifts and graces that belong exclusively to bishops ;—in short, if they are no more than mere men, and if they have nothing but assumption to offer instead of proof, we must be pardoned for not admitting a claim which rests on such a foundation, and for adopting the language—"Jesus we know, and Paul we know ; but who are you ?"

When we take into account the unnumbered changes that have occurred in the temporal and spiritual authorities by which Christendom was governed during so many centuries ; when we call to mind that the course of events has flowed through scenes of the most varied character—that our religion has been professed by men in all the gradations from barbarism to refinement —that it was almost totally submerged by superstition during ages of darkness—that the Papal throne itself was the object of long and violent contention, Pope against Pope, excommuni-

cating and anathematising each other—it is by much too large a demand upon our faith to believe, that, during these charges of heresy and schism, which the parties in this Church militant hurled unsparingly against each other, the sacred gift was preserved in all its integrity, and in all its wondrous influence, and transmitted as an inheritance to the bishops of our day. The history of the Papacy leaves us no room to doubt that the office was repeatedly filled by men who not only were unworthy of any Christian office, but were an utter disgrace to human nature. And yet this is the channel, and the only channel, through which, according to the doctrine of Apostolical succession, even Protestant bishops derive their supposed spiritual powers. Can we then be brought to believe that such a holy gift has been miraculously conveyed to a particular order of men by the most polluted medium, and, having escaped the corruptions through which it passed, is imparted now, in all the plenitude of its power, and in all the blessedness of its influence, by the imposition of Episcopal hands, and of them alone?

On this point I shall quote the words of Archbishop Whately, who utterly repudiates such authority, and contrast them with those of others of his Church who hold an opposite opinion.

"There is not," says he, "a minister in all Christendom who is able to trace up, with any approach to certainty, his own spiritual pedigree. During the dark ages, irregularities could not have been wholly excluded without a perpetual miracle. We read of bishops being consecrated when mere children—of men officiating who barely knew their letters—of profligate laymen and habitual drunkards admitted to holy orders; in short, of the prevalence of every kind of disorder."

Mr. Macaulay, the celebrated historian, in his essays, states—

"The transmission of orders from the Apostles to an English clergyman of the present day must have been through a great number of intermediate persons. Now, it is probable that no clergyman can trace up his spiritual genealogy from bishop to bishop, so far back as the time of the Conquest. There remain many centuries during which the history of the transmission of his orders is buried in utter darkness. Extreme obscurity overhangs the history of the middle ages, and the facts which are discernible through that obscurity prove that the Church was exceedingly ill regulated. We read of sees of the highest dignity openly sold, transferred backwards and forwards by popular tumult, and sometimes bestowed by a warlike baron on a kinsman who was a mere stripling. We read of bishops of ten years old; of bishops five years old; of Popes who were mere boys. We

are at a loss, therefore, to conceive how any clergyman can feel confident that his orders have come down correctly.—(*Apud* Madge, p. 120.)

In contrast with these, let us hear the puseyite doctrine. The far-famed Bishop of Exeter, who still lingers in the Church, "wishing to go, but loth to depart," in one of his charges to his clergy, quotes the words of the Ordination Service in the Church of England—

"Receive the Holy Ghost. Whose sins ye remit, they are remitted; whose sins ye retain, they are retained;" and adds, "this was the awful authority given by Christ to His first ministers, and in them, and through them, to all their successors. This is the awful authority we have received, and which we must never be ashamed nor afraid to tell the people we have received."

The views of this school, with regard to religious toleration, may also be distinctly learned from their published works. An archdeacon of the Church (Townsend), in a charge to the clergy of Allerton, observes—

"It is better to inflict punishment on the persons of the heresiarchs than to wait to confute their opinions, because these opinions are injurious."

In the History of the Church of Ireland, by Dr. Mant, late Bishop of Down and Connor, we find an evident regret at the relaxation and final removal of penal statutes on account of the exercise of religion. Referring to the mild, and peaceful, and truly Christian labours of the pious Bishop Bedel, in the reign of Charles I., for the improvement of the native Irish, by instructing them through the medium of their own language, whilst he cannot withhold his praise from this benevolent undertaking, he adds, without any censure—

"This plan of reformation was not countenanced by Lord Wentworth during his viceroyalty, the principle of whose administration was, to enforce religious unity by Church discipline, and to invigorate Church discipline with the secular arm. It was in those days, indeed, the prevailing and general opinion, that for suppressing vice and profaneness, for counteracting schism and sacrilege, the dishonour and bane of the Reformation, as well as for extirpating the lesser evils from which the Reformation sprang, the most effectual, if not the only expedient was, to allow the Church the free exercise of that spiritual power which she derives from Christ only, and to render it significant and operative by civil penalties."

I could multiply quotations to the same purpose, from the same quarter; but these will satisfy you that this new school in

the Church of England has not only followed the Church of Rome in her leading doctrines and ceremonies, but also in her exclusiveness. It has been labouring with untiring zeal for several years, by various plans and devices, to lead men back, were it possible, to the darkness of the middle ages, to rouse the spirit of intolerance which has been slumbering, and to re-establish priestly domination in all the plenitude of its abused authority. This strange movement has naturally been hailed with delight by members of the Roman Catholic Church, who have been led to anticipate from it the speedy ascendancy of their opinions in these countries. To this cause principally I would attribute that strange attempt at the extension of ecclesiastical authority, on the part of the Bishop of Rome, that has roused the indignation of Protestant England. This assumption of power is the natural result of those principles which have long been maintained by the Roman Catholic Church, and, however they may be in abeyance under peculiar circumstances, have never been renounced. They found a corresponding feeling in the High Church party, who, moved by their too sanguine expectations, hastily arrived at the (to them) gratifying conclusion, that England was on the eve of returning to the ancient faith. This hope was incautiously expressed, and the result has been that Cardinal Wiseman, and his newly-made bishops, have roused the old religious war-cry of "No Popery," to the great danger of reviving all the bitterness of intolerance, and of resuscitating a spirit that we had trusted had slumbered into death.

The controversy rests, no doubt, between the rival Churches of England and Rome; and, as the question of spiritual supremacy which each claims is wholly repudiated by Protestant Dissenters of every shade of opinion, we do not feel particularly concerned. But, so far as the progress of religious freedom is involved, it becomes a matter of deep interest; and it is our right and duty to watch anxiously over a movement by which our chartered principles might be in any manner compromised. It seems a matter of no consequence to us, whether the Church of Rome shall or shall not have a hierarchy in England, nor how many bishops the Pope may create; but it does seem a matter in which we are deeply concerned, whether there is anything in the course which the contending parties are following that is likely to limit religious freedom, or circumscribe religious charity; and it is our duty, not by resorting to penal laws, but by the exercise of reason, "to contend earnestly for the faith once delivered to the saints."

Upon a candid review of ecclesiastical history, it must be acknowledged that all Churches, when they had the power, have been guilty of the great sin of religious intolerance. The Church of Rome, no doubt, has been most to blame; chiefly, I presume,

from the length of time she has existed and the extent of power she has enjoyed. Her long reign continued during ages of darkness and barbarism ; and the spiritual and temporal authority conceded to her by human ignorance led her to assert the right of legislating in opinion, and persecution of those who refused to submit was the natural and unavoidable consequence.

Much of her power passed away into other hands by the Reformation ; but the growth of toleration, or rather of genuine religious freedom, has been very slow indeed ; and, whilst heartily condemning all persecution for opinion—all uncharitableness, even where it has not led to overt acts, I would ask, what Protestant Church is there that has *not* persecuted when it had the power ?—nay, what Church is there, that has surrounded itself with the entrenchments of creeds and confessions, which has not interfered with the free exercise of thought, and, when allied with the State, has not been ready to call in the aid of the civil power to restrain the offenders against ecclesiastical statutes ? We have seen how the canons of the Church of England are directed against all who dare to call in question any part of her Book of Common Prayer ; and we may rest satisfied that it is the liberal spirit of our age and our free institutions, not the indisposition of Churchmen, that protects those who dissent from her communion.

Even the Church of Scotland, which is more of a democratic form, and rather more favourable to human liberty, acknowledges the right of the civil magistrate to legislate in matters of religious doctrine and worship. In her celebrated Westminster Confession of Faith, to which all who partake of her privileges must signify assent, it is said, " The civil magistrate may not assume the administration of the Word and sacraments, or the power of the keys of the kingdom of heaven ; yet he hath authority, and it is his *duty*, to take order that unity and peace be preserved—that the truth of God be kept pure and entire—that all blasphemies and heresies be suppressed—all corruptions and abuses in worship and discipline be prevented and reformed—all the ordinances of God duly settled, and administered, and observed. For the better effecting whereof, he hath power to call synods, to be present at them, and to provide that whatsoever is transacted in them be according to the mind of God." Now, these are concessions to the civil power very hard to reconcile with that unfettered individual judgment, and with the sole supremacy of Christ as Head of His Church, which led to the renunciation of Popery, and on which alone the reformed religion can be successfully defended. In fact, a true Presbyterian will be prepared to affirm that the British Sovereign and Parliament have no more right to make laws for the regulation of Christians, in their spiritual concerns, than the Bishop of Rome.

Yet, with marvellous inconsistency, the words which I have read to you, subversive as they are of some of man's dearest natural rights, and altogether at variance with true Protestantism, are solemnly subscribed at this present day by the Church of Scotland and the General Assembly of Irish Presbyterians. Ages have passed, and ages may yet pass, ere, by the progress of civilization and the power of enlightened public opinion, this great truth shall come to be fully and universally recognized amongst Christians—that man can have no legitimate dominion over the understanding or the conscience of his fellow-man.

Akin to the assumption of spiritual authority, and blended with it, is the doctrine that man's salvation depends upon his holding certain religious principles, and this doctrine is not confined to any one sect. The Roman Catholic boldly and unhesitatingly declares it; the Episcopalian of the Church of England adopts it; and, to express his utter abhorrence of what he deems heresy, borrows the mystical creed of St. Athanasius from the Church of Rome; whilst the consistent member of the Church of Scotland and its affiliated Churches responds to the sentiment; and all unite in hurling anathemas of eternal condemnation against the Unitarian, whose duty, and, I trust, whose practice is, to condemn no man for his honest belief, and to return blessing for cursing.

To this doctrine of exclusive salvation, held by so many Christians, in opposition to the genius of Christianity, I would unhesitatingly ascribe a very large portion of that bigotry, unhappily so prevalent in the world, that has filled human breasts with envyings, and bitterness, and evil thoughts, and all manner of uncharitableness. When men once are persuaded that all are God's enemies who do not hold their doctrinal opinions, the transition is easy; nay, it seems to be a sacred duty to avoid and to detest them. Such rash and uncharitable judgments, in times gone by, filled the earth with cruelty. Thank God! through the progress of truth and liberty, they are not likely to be renewed; but wherever this feeling of religious exclusiveness has entered into and taken possession of the human bosom, it conceals its odious character under the mask of duty, pleads conscience as an excuse for want of charity, darkens the understanding, and hardens the heart.

And amongst how many of those calling themselves Protestants is this most narrow, most intolerant creed to be found! and what numbers of these are now calling out with all their might against the assumptions of Popery! I would entreat all such, without losing a moment of time, to root out of their own minds the principle which they so loudly and so justly condemn in others; and to be assured of this, that the belief that God has made our future happiness to depend wholly on our holding cer-

tain opinions has been one of the greatest and most destructive heresies that ever sprang up in the Church of Christ.

There is this difference, farther, between the Roman Catholics and the Protestants on the subject of toleration—that the former sins in the darkness of his ignorance, and in obedience to an authority which he has been taught to think is derived from Heaven. The latter sins when his mind has been opened to receive the light of truth, and whilst he repudiates all human dictation in matters of faith. The former sins in following implicitly, without duly exercising his reason, the doctrines of the Church in which he has been brought up; the latter sins in opposition to the principles of free inquiry, which he professes and advocates, and by which alone his separation from the Church of Rome can be vindicated. When a Roman Catholic, then, hurls his condemnation against those who do not belong to what he fondly imagines is the true and only Church, he acts consistently with his creed. But when a nominal Protestant follows his example, and dooms to never-ending misery those who, in the exercise of an undoubted privilege and in the discharge of a sacred duty, have presumed to differ from him, the inconsistency is most glaring, and we are prompted indignantly to ask, "Who art thou that judgest another man's servant? to his own master he standeth or falleth. Why dost thou judge thy brother, or why set at nought thy brother? for we must all stand before the judgment-seat of Christ."

To such I would recommend the words of Jesus, when he says, "Why beholdest thou the mote that is in thy brother's eye, but considerest not the beam that is in thine own eye? Or how wilt thou say to thy brother, Let me pull out the mote out of thine eye; and, behold, a beam is in thine own eye? Thou hypocrite! first cast out the beam out of thine own eye, and then shalt thou see clearly to cast out the mote out of thy brother's eye."

With regard to intolerance, the Churches I have named, so far as their creeds are concerned, are pretty much on an equality; and the one which is free from sin on this point may throw the first stone at the others. But, in justice, I must add, that the speculative uncharitableness of Protestantism is greatly abated and neutralized by a kind of recognition of the authority of Scripture, and the modified exercise of private judgment.

In the great excitement that has been raised in England on the subject of Papal aggression, people have been, I think, unnecessarily alarmed about the growth of Popery. Numbers, no doubt, of the clergy, and some of the influential laity of the Established Church have passed over—but they were in a state of transition; they were already prepared for the change, by the forms and ceremonies of human devices that

had been retained, even after the Reformation—by the spirit of exclusiveness which yet lingered amongst them, and by the fond wish of priestly domination. But, when we look to the Protestant Dissenting Churches, where human authority is disclaimed, and men are taught to reason and to discuss questions in theology, and familiarized with free institutions, we do not find any defections. The balance of conversion inclines to the other side, and Dissent remains impregnable to the assaults of Popery.

It is said by the alarmists, what I readily admit, that the assumptions of the Roman Catholic Church are directly opposed to the progress of human improvement. Were mankind to submit to have dictators, they must resign freedom of thought and freedom of action. The line of demarcation that separates temporal from spiritual power is so fine, and in many cases so faintly drawn, that it is difficult to see, and may be either unwittingly or advisedly transgressed without remark. For instance, the Church of Rome assumes, as a spiritual right, the power to direct not merely the *religious* education of her youth, which might be fairly conceded, but even secular education; making a free use of an *Index Expurgatorius*, expunging from history, or mutilating all those passages of sad, but not doubtful truth, which record instances of persecution with which that Church is chargeable. Thus history becomes, indeed, in such hands, a one-sided story, and the lessons which might be derived from bygone ages as to the evils of bigotry and intolerance, are wholly lost. In science, too, if we are to be guided by the uncontradicted statements of its progress in Rome, and its application to useful purposes in facilitating human intercourse, we must at once deprecate all ecclesiastical interference. In social relations this power would also be at work, to check the natural flow of youthful emotions which, in schools and colleges, draws warm hearts together, irrespective of creeds; and, by implanting and fostering in them the seeds of kindness and good-will, anticipate the schemes of the bigot, who would fill them with distrust and little religious prejudices.

This very unfavourable view of the tendency of the Roman Catholic faith, as it has been recently developed, brings with it conviction to my mind that we have really little to fear from its increase. This is an age of progress, and we might as reasonably suppose that mankind would revert to the state of ignorance, and barbarism, and slavery, from which they have been emancipated by the advance of civilization. If you can imagine that the feudal rights of a proud aristocracy could be restored in England, and that the free-born of the people could be persuaded to submit to serfdom, and assume the collar of servitude, and bow in meek submission to a master and lord, then you may

imagine it possible that any Church on earth will be able to extend its power, and vindicate its supremacy over those who have hitherto spurned its yoke, or that any efforts will be successful to erect a universal spiritual despotism, and "bring the unbound spirit into bonds again." Whilst arts and sciences remain amongst us—whilst the press, that glorious engine "by which the Reformation was so much advanced," transmits to mankind the experience of bygone ages, and spreads abroad new discoveries—there is no danger of the earth being again covered with the darkness of ignorance. It is as the bow in the heavens, indicating that such a calamity will never more deluge the world.

I shall here quote to you a portion of the celebrated speech of Sir George Saville, in the British House of Commons, in 1772, on bringing up a petition from some ministers of the Establishment, for relief in the matter of subscription to the Thirty-nine Articles, which seems to me apposite to the subject that has been discussed :—

"Some gentlemen seem to apprehend that we are to make the doors of the Church as narrow and to exclude as many as possible. I think we should make them as wide as we can, to take in as many as possible. Others are apprehensive that, in case the Scriptures are substituted in the room of the Articles, it will be the means of admitting into the Church a great number of sectaries. Sectaries, Sir! Had it not been for sectaries, this cause had been tried at Rome. Thank God, it is tried here!

"Some gentlemen fear that, if we lay aside the Articles, and place the Scriptures in their stead, by throwing down all distinctions we shall admit Papists, and, together with them, their religion too. But they forget that Papists are excluded by the oath of supremacy, and by the declaration against transubstantiation, against the invocation of the Virgin Mary and other saints, and against the sacrifice of the mass. And if any other test be needful, let them be made to acknowledge liberty of conscience and the right of private judgment; let them abjure persecution—that were truly a Protestant test. But can any one seriously think that encouraging free inquiry and the study of the Scriptures will issue in the Romish religion? When I see a rivulet flow to the top of a rock, and requiring a strong engine to force it back again, then shall I think that liberty of judgment will be prejudicial to the Protestant religion—then shall I think that adhering to the Scriptures only will lead to Rome.

"Some gentlemen talk of 'raising barriers about the Church of God and protecting His house'—language that is astonishing, that is

shocking, that almost approaches to blasphemy. What! man, a poor, vile, contemptible reptile, talk of raising barriers about the Church of God! He might as well talk of protecting Omnipotence, and raising barriers about His throne. Barriers about the Church of God, Sir!—about that Church which, if there be any veracity in Scripture, shall continue for ever, and against which the gates of hell shall not prevail! If I may be allowed, on so serious an occasion, to recollect a fable—it puts me in mind of one which I have met with—of a stately, magnificent, impregnable castle, built on a rock, the basis of which was the centre of the earth, the top of it pierced the clouds, the thickness of the walls could not be measured by cubits. At the bottom of it, a few moles were one day very busy in raising up a little quantity of earth, which, when some mice saw, 'What are you doing,' said they, 'to disturb the tranquillity of the lord of this castle?' 'We are not disturbing his tranquillity,' replied the moles; 'all b'ind as you are, you may see that we are only throwing up a rampart to protect his castle.'

"The Church of God can protect itself. Truth needs not be afraid of not obtaining the victory, on a fair trial. The lovers of truth will love all sincere inquirers after it, though they may differ from them in various religious sentiments; for it is to impartial, free inquiry only, that error owes its ruin and truth its success. Those who are penetrated with the benevolent spirit of the Gospel will not condemn as heretics, will not reject as unworthy of their affection, any who believe the Christian religion—who search and endeavour to understand the Scripture—though they may be unable to comply with creeds and articles."

I have said that, strictly speaking, Protestant Dissenters have little concern with the strife between the rival Churches. Yet, as the more ancient one boasts of her unchangeableness, whilst the latter is the child of reform, I may, perhaps, be pardoned for offering a few suggestions, which, at this time, when so rudely assailed, might be turned to her advantage.

I would then say, that it would be wise in that Church to review her articles and formularies, reconciling them with each other, and with Scripture and reason—expunging from her Book of Common Prayer all incomprehensible and uncharitable creeds—requiring no subscription to any but the Holy Scriptures, the only unerring rule of faith and practice—apportioning more equitably her large endowments—not giving thousands and tens of thousands to lordly bishops, who fare sumptuously every day, and superfluous wealth to other dignitaries, whilst the real working clergy, men of equal education and worth, are starving

upon salaries that the pampered Churchman would think too small to give his menials. Let them put an end to the buying and selling of preferments, or, as they are called in strange words, "*the cure of souls*," and let them devote themselves assiduously to the varied duties of their office—to the diffusion of knowledge of every kind—to the bettering of the condition of the poor—to the cultivation of kind feeling toward all men; and they may rest undisturbed by the aggressions of Popery. Let the rulers of the Church open wide her gates for the admission of conscientious men—remove those mouldering walls and buttresses in whose wild recesses the owl and the bat have long securely nestled—let in the light and air of heaven upon the gloom of ancient days, and participate in the improvements of the world, and they have nothing to apprehend from any attempts at ecclesiastical despotism;—the evil spirits of ignorance, superstition, and intolerance, like other unblest influences, will vanish at the dawning of the day.

If these, or similar reforms are made and carried out in a comprehensive manner, and in a true spirit, the Church of England, sustained by its noble seats of learning, and associated as it is with so many venerable names, may yet hold a distinguished place amongst the free institutions of our country; but if it prove otherwise, and the solemn warnings it has from time to time received be neglected or disregarded, and it continue to obstruct the course of improvement, its days are numbered. Beleaguered from without by wakeful and energetic foes, and but feebly defended from within by a garrison, many of whom are faithless to its cause, it must eventually fall, and lie in unhonoured ruins; whilst the Church of Christ, composed as it is of good men of various creeds, differing in opinion, but united in spirit—based as it is on truth, and cemented by charity, shall be unmoved as the rock of the ocean, against whose sides the winds and the waters beat and exhaust themselves in vain.

LECTURE FOR THE TIMES:

DELIVERED

IN THE MUSIC HALL, BELFAST,

ON THE EVENING OF WEDNESDAY, FEB. 12, 1851.

BY THE

REV. HENRY ALEXANDER.

AND PUBLISHED AT THE REQUEST OF MANY OF THOSE WHO HEARD IT.

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LECTURE FOR THE TIMES.

GALATIANS II. 11.

"But when Peter was come to Antioch, I withstood him to the face, because he was to be blamed."

A POPULAR writer gives a striking illustration of the different impressions which the same landscape will produce on different minds, awakening in one man feelings of admiration and reverence that are akin to worship—in another, but a wondering estimate of the marketable value of its broad acres and well-stored homesteads. So it is: we make our own outward world. Our characters, and habits of thought and feelings, determine for us the nature of outward things and events. The *interpreter* of all the revelations that God makes to us, whether by outward nature, by the events of life, or by the written Word, is within. Let times of religious excitement, such as the present, arise; and so far as the disturbing influence of sect and party will allow, men shall range themselves according to their characteristic tendencies. Some, having little religious interest one way or the other, will urge on or deprecate the excitement, just as it may chance to affect their political combinations or social intercourse; others will feel with good Bishop Leighton, who prayed that, while so many were preaching for "the times," he might be allowed to say a word for charity and the Gospel; or, like Falkland, who wandered amidst scenes of strife, crying, "Peace, peace!" Others, with a burning zeal for truth, or what they deem such, will cry, "First pure, then peaceable;" "I am come to send fire on the earth; and what will I if it be already kindled;"—while others, again, with perhaps larger and wider view, will recognise in such conflicts the necessary conditions of progress, and try to see, even in the strife of words, God's care working out some good issue for the world. Assuredly, he would carry away a miserably poor and utterly false wisdom from a survey of the present religious agitation, who should find in it but food to feed his scepticism, and not proof rather of the truth and gravity of religion, and the everlasting lodgment and hold she hath in the human mind. Were it priestcraft and statecraft all, priests and politicians have long since done enough to cause its indignant rejection. But God hath planted

irrepressible instincts in our nature, which in religion alone find their true objects; the Gospel meets a deep and genuine want of our souls, and therefore it is that, despite so much to disgust and repel, the religion of the Gospel is still living amongst us, and engages with sincere earnestness the thoughts and affections of our best and noblest minds. It is in this spirit of reverence that we should endeavour to read what is passing before our eyes. I cannot feel with those who make little of the whole affair, and "regard it merely as an ordinary outburst of sectarian jealousy," but rather with those who, however little they may think of the "aggression" itself, recognise in the present state of the public mind the battle of great and vital principles, and hope that it shall prove itself to be a genuine movement of the religious life of this great people. That it is, so to speak, an irregular, startling, and in many respects undignified movement, does not invalidate its claim to be a genuine one; for the development of religion finds its emblem not only in animal or vegetable growth—which, with an equable increase, draweth on to perfection,—but also in the mighty river, which, flowing long time with slow motion, across some high table-land, comes now and again to steep and rocky falls, which, indeed, disturb its placidity and cover it with spray, but, at the same time, impart a velocity it knew not before; carrying it, in brief space of time, far on its onward course towards the great ocean. There is in religion, it is true, a gradual development always going on; but its most striking advances have ever been of men in masses, impelled by an unanticipated crisis to cast off some spiritual burthen or grasp some neglected truth.

Is this such a crisis?

Popular Protestantism has long wielded the whole influences of Protestant Christendom. It has enjoyed every advantage that civilization, enlightenment, and the direction of all the great institutions of society could bestow; and, notwithstanding, it has lost ground. Its own report is, that its masses in the great towns are alienated from all religion; and that, in the higher ranks, it is gained on by Roman Catholicism. What is amiss? Are we intruding if we give our thoughts as well as others? I believe that, as Unitarians, we have a legitimate *locus standi* in the court of this high controversy. No doubt, it would be exceedingly convenient to "ignore" us just now. We stand in the way of many an argument, and spoil the sequence of many a syllogism. Many a popular controversialist feels the Unitarian standing at his back, ready to use against himself the very arguments he finds effective against Rome; but that we cannot help. It is the privilege of every man, in this free country, to speak to all that choose to listen; and the knowledge that it is my privilege to-night to address many who have no

sympathy with those peculiar views of religion which I hold true, I feel only to be a reason why I should, with the less ambiguity, say what solution anything that is distinctive in those views may appear to me to give of the difficulties of the time.

Let me repeat my text—"But when Peter was come to Antioch, I withstood him to the face, because he was to be blamed." I take that to mean, that while Paul entertained the sincerest respect and brotherly affection for Peter, he found it quite consistent with that respect and affection, frankly to express his disapproval of certain principles on which Peter acted, as a member of the Church; and I take it to be a fair and practical inference that I may frankly object to anything in the principles or constitution of any of the Christian Churches of the land, without any inconsistency with my avowal of sincere respect and full appreciation of the soul of goodness that is in them all.

I purpose to inquire, for the short time I shall feel justified in detaining you here—What grounds there are for any alarm as to the progress of the Roman Catholic religion, and what are the effective and legitimate means within our reach to stay its progress? I will not be deterred, by fear of being called an alarmist, from saying that, in my opinion, there are grounds for alarm, and that it behoves all who value liberty of thought, and speech, and pure religion, to ply zealously every weapon of offence and defence which self-respect, regard for the rights of others, and the spirit of the Gospel, will allow. I acknowledge at once that my sympathies are with those who are alarmed at the progress of the Roman Catholic Church; and, although I think that, however that alarm may, in many cases, be greatly exaggerated, and may have hurried men into words and wishes not to be defended, that it is nevertheless well-founded. But what is it we fear? What if the Roman Catholic Church should extend and strengthen itself? What if it should become in reality what it falsely assumes itself to be—the sole Christianity of the world? If men choose to become Roman Catholics, if they like it better, what then? Especially, it may be asked of us, who will not swear that it is "Antichrist," "damnable," or "idolatrous?" What then? Is it an evil, and an evil of such magnitude as thus to cast a nation on its knees, as it were, to protest in the sight of Heaven against the faintest possibility of its infliction? Are we not in this turning away from our salvation, even as the Jews did from Christ himself? It cannot be denied that, for men as good and wise as any of us, that religion has its attractions. It bears not to them the repulsive aspect it does to us, but enchains their whole souls with an affection which we must admit to be at least as ardent as any Protestant feels for his faith. It has its martyrs as meek, its saints as holy, its missionaries as self-devoted, its worshippers as

devout as any Church can boast of. In its cells have delicate spirits found retreat from a rough and uncongenial world. In its monasteries have learned men found peace and leisure. Its spiritual arm has been uplifted in defence of weakness, in times when might was the only right. Its voice has often burst the captive's chain, when the fierce baron would heed no other. It has made white men, in South America, look on black men as their brethren, to a degree that Protestantism, in North America, has as yet failed to do. It has consecrated to God's service the noblest works of art, and raised monuments of architecture which Protestantism in vain strives to imitate. It first opened up a way for humble talent, and held its highest offices ready for the lowest serf. But hear for a little one of its own eloquent admirers :—"Those were happy times," says Novalis, "when Europe formed one Christian land, when one Christianity dwelt throughout the civilized part of the world, and one great mutual interest bound together the most remote provinces of this wide spiritual empire. Without great worldly possessions, one spiritual head directed and united the great political powers. A numerous society, to which every one had access, existed, subservient to this head, and fulfilled his wishes, whilst it zealously endeavoured to strengthen his beneficent powers. A filial confidence closely united men to these holy dispensers of relief, protection, and advice. How contentedly could each one fulfil his daily work, when, by these holy men a safe futurity was prepared for him—when, through them, every transgression was forgiven him !—every offensive blot of life made manifest and effaced ! These were the experienced pilots on the deep, unknown sea. Peace went out from them : they preached but of love towards that blessed, marvellously beautiful, virgin of Christianity, who, being endowed with divine powers, was ready to save every true believer from most frightful dangers. . . With what serenity of mind did men depart from the beautiful assemblies in those mysterious churches which were adorned with animating pictures, filled with sweet incense, and enlivened with a holy, soul-lifting music ? There were gratefully preserved in costly shrines the sacred remains of revered, good men —there God's power and goodness were displayed in glorious signs and wonders, the effect of the great charity of these holy souls. And as loving hearts preserve lockets of hair, or autographs of departed lovers, and thereby nourish sweet flames of affection until death unites them, even so there were collected, with devout care, whatever belonged to these blessed souls, and every one esteemed himself happy who could possess, or even touch, a part of such consoling relics. The wise head of the Church justly opposed the rash fancies of individual study and unseasonable, dangerous discoveries, in the department of know-

ledge, that were opposed to the welfare of the Holy See. He therefore checked a bold thinker from openly asserting that the earth was an insignificant comet; for he well knew that, when men lose all esteem for their earthly fatherland, they also think less of their heavenly home and its inhabitants. These were the beautiful, natural features of true Catholic or Christian times." *

Let us admit now, frankly, that there must be an aspect of this religion that is attractive, not merely to the indolent and sensuous, that will have an easy salvation and a gorgeous ceremonial; but also, strange as it may seem to us, to the pure mind, to the cultivated intellect, and to the lofty imagination. But, not a jot the less on account of such admission, assert we our right and duty to look at it, not with our senses enraptured by its splendour, or our eyes beclouded by its pageantry, but in the clear light of reason, conscience, and Holy Scripture, and sternly to ask, not is it beautiful, poetical, entrancing, but is it *true* and good; and demand this, not of poetry, fancy, or eloquence, but of history and fact.

In forming an estimate of this Church, there is happily no necessity to engage in the ungracious task of referring to its abuses, the stains upon its history, or the details of its discipline, or, still less, to throw any imputation on the motives or characters of its priesthood. We need simply to examine its fundamental principle, its essential idea, as a Church.

What is a Church? It has been differently defined. Try a poet—

> "What is a church—our honest sexton tells,
> 'Tis a tall building with a tower and bells.
>
> "What is a church? A flock, "our vicar cries,"
> Whom bishops govern, and whom priests advise."
>
> "What is a church? Let truth and reason speak,
> They would reply, "The faithful, pure, and meek,
> From Christian folds, the one selected race,
> Of all professions, and in every place."—*Crabbe.*

A true Church, according to the Puritan, is that which, in its systematic theology, discipline, and form of government, is according to the pattern laid down in Scripture. No, says the Unitarian, there is a religion, but no *system* of theology, code of discipline, or form of government, laid down in Scripture at all, and a true Church is "a congregation of faithful men," drawn together by mutual sympathy with the spirit of Christ, and agreeing so far in theology as to avoid jarring in the *expression* of that sympathy. A Church, as I understand Mr.

* "Christianity in Europe," by Novalis (Friedrich Von Hardenberg).

Gladstone's theory is, the *State* propagating and defending religious truth—this State's conscience being the ultimate judge. The truth is to be thus defended and propagated :—A Church, according to Archbishop Whately, is the perpetuation of the synagogue, single societies of disciples, having federal bonds, but no unity, save in name, and its officers no sacerdotal duties, and no title save that of being regularly appointed officers of a regular Christian community. A Church, says Dr. Arnold, is "a Society for the purpose of making men like Christ, and one form of church government is exactly as much according to Christ's will as another." But "the Popish and Oxford view is, that the Church is the mediator between God and the individual—the Church (*i.e.* the clergy) is a sort of chartered corporation, by belonging to which, privileges are acquired. This view," he justly adds, "lays the stress, not on the relations of a man's heart to God and Christ, but, on his belonging to a society, that may or may not help him in goodness."

Such is the Roman Catholic Church. Not like that of Scotland, or other Reformed Churches, which holds forth a body of doctrine, discipline, and government, as *their interpretation of Scripture*, but a sacred college, whose charter is from Heaven, whose lectures are inspirations, and whose lowest officials may every day work stranger miracles than any that glorified the path of Jesus. A Church that claims a delegation, not merely of the wisdom, but of the power of God ; a world-wide corporation of priests, that claims Scripture primarily for itself alone, and catches from the echoes of the past what Scripture fails to tell, or faintly tells—that holds the electric wire by which alone the thoughts of earth can reach the ear of Heaven —that imparts a sanctity to dead matter, and saves souls by what seem to us charms, and spells, and manipulations, and cabalistic words ; a Church that forbids inquiry, brings conscience into its confessional, making it a duty to detain and analyze and give a body of words to every passing evil thought, lays its finger on the most secret privacies, and tends to the control and guidance of every relation of human life ; I say tends to, for with such pretensions to sacerdotal authority, it is in vain to draw the line between what is spiritual and what is temporal. All life is spiritual. Your domestic economy, your public policy—all ultimately touch on what is spiritual in man, and nothing but the rebellion of man's reason and conscience, the jealousy of kings, and the bitter memory and experience of the past, hinders this sacerdotal army taking possession of every city-wall and castle-tower, and ruling with despotic sway, beneficent or otherwise, the whole family of man. Among other things, according to Mr. Ward, one of the late converts, the Church must authoritatively settle what books a bookseller

may distribute—what causes a barrister may plead. The full realization of the ends of this organization implies the absorption of all other organizations—implies the enthronement of a theocracy that would be also as far as might be from the rule of God; and all this without any imputation of necessary hypocrisy or deceit on the part of the priesthood. It flows from its fundamental principle of being in an immediate contact with Heaven, denied to the laity. It is inherent in all priestly pretensions, and *is nothing but what ought to be, if those pretensions are well founded.* It is not the *doctrines* of this Church, then, so much as its *sacerdotal character*, that makes it unfriendly to spiritual progress, and a drag on the advance of the world. It is this that causes it to be uninfluenced by the progress of time. Change!—How can it? It speaks direct with Heaven. Can Heaven change, abandon its old ground, and advance with the times! That were to say, God hath lied! Shall argument affect it? What! argue with Inspiration! Shall the light of reason reach it? What! outshine the lamp of God!

Obedience is a holy thing, and a sweet discipline for the soul, when God, by His dear Son, or true prophet in any age, takes us by the hand and leads us as loving children by His side; but obedience to mere *official* men, in the high concerns of the soul —subjugation of our wills to the spiritual despotism of a corporation, with claims founded, not on a superior wisdom, but on a stupendous assumption—can, even if that despotism were always, as in part it has been and is, exercised, in purity and love, have but one result, the retarding of human progress, and the depression of those feelings of self-reliance and self-respect on which even the material well-being of the world depends—and in its manifest unfriendliness to the growth of which feelings, we shall find one reason that justifies the historian in asserting that those countries where this Church has ruled—ever lagged behind others in civilization—science, healthy public feeling, and in the growth and stability of civil freedom.

I forbear, as from a most unwelcome theme, any detail of what this principle, working in the past, has said and done. I rest my rejection of this Church, as a Protestant, on this essential principle of its very constitution. Without opening a page of the past, I know that intolerance must be the breath of its life, (zealous Catholics do not disclaim intolerance); that it will not brook human control; that it will curse, excommunicate, evil entreat, at times and in places burn the prophets, or those we deem such, and that its only limitation, short of universal spiritual and temporal rule, is the insurrection at last of man's reason and conscience, that says, even in Roman Catholic countries—"Be thou of Heaven or no—thus far shalt thou go, and no farther." I think it a wholesome instinct that makes us

shrink from a Church resting on such a basis. But here I am met by the assertion, that any alarm on this head is out of date; that it is childishness to fear the advance of such a religion; that we are but looking from the grave of the past spectres, to affright weak minds; that the very picture I have drawn of the evil nature, and tendency, and manifest absurdity of such high and ill-sustained pretensions, is itself proof that its day is past; that these flashings are but those of the fires of an expiring superstition; and that in this, the nineteenth century—the age of steam, and electricity, and books, and education—its hour is struck, and its destiny is determined. I have faith in human progress, in the development of true religion—in the sure, onward, majestic flow of the great tide of truth and good, that, under God's care, is at last to fill every creek and inlet, and wash away the slime and filth that offend God's earth; but I remember it is a tide, and, like that of the great ocean itself, has its ebbings as well as flowings; and who can be quite sure that our bark may not be on the retreating wave? or who can give the time-table of such retreat, and say at what hour it will again advance with new and greater energy to occupy with its holy presence a larger region than before? We see in part and know in part: we can but cast ourselves on God, and with the same cry to Him express our fear and our trust. I shall state some reasons for fearing that the Roman Catholic religion will advance—that we have not seen as yet more than the first-fruits of the reaction in its favour, and that we shall have to witness numerous conversions, and, it may be, in very unexpected quarters.

1. There is the great, unquestionable fact of the reaction itself. That Church may have made a false move just now; but if so, she was tempted to it, because she knew herself to stand on very different ground from that which she occupied a few years ago. She has found means to recommend herself in quarters, and to minds, from which, short time since, her principles would have been repelled in disgust. Her zeal, and courage, and hope are revived. At the Reformation, Luther seemed to have dealt her a death-blow, and, for a time, she was paralysed and disheartened; but the Society of the Jesuits arose, and, with a skill, and wisdom, and success, that have ever since been the admiration of history, stayed the tide, regained lost ground, and reduced Protestantism to very narrow limits, indeed, compared to those it first seemed to promise to itself.

Something of a kindred revival has reacted here now. Two years ago, men were shouting pæans for the downfal of Rome, and blessing the brave Italians who had exchanged the crozier for the president's hand-bell; and now she is bolder, more confident —ay, and in this empire at least, more victorious in winning converts than ever. The political condition of her head may

be unstable; but if he, the Napoleon of spiritual rule, were driven to an Elba or a St. Helena, is it certain that this would lessen—is it certain that this would not increase his real influence? It had been easy for me to have given some of the particulars of her converts, their rank and numbers; but it is not needed that I should give the statistics of her triumphs. She boasts, and her boast is allowed. I fear her advance, then, because she has advanced, and shows the zeal, and courage, and confidence that are the true weapons in every such warfare.

2. I fear her advance because, while, in certain characteristics of our time, she has opponents that must effectually prevent her progress in one direction, and work her final overthrow, she has allies in certain other features, arising from the condition, feelings, and institutions of a large and susceptible class. She has allies in the weaknesses of humanity, in its indolence, its credulity, and its ignorance. She meets what is weakest in our hearts; she is distrustful of what is highest and noblest; true to man's deep feeling of sinfulness, and need of pardon and relief—false to his sense of self-reliance, manly independence, and filial, unsheltered trust in God. There are two classes of society peculiarly open to her inroads—the grossly ignorant, and, therefore, the grossly credulous; and a class of minds in the upper ranks, who live at all times an artificial life, are seldom allowed to see things in their simplicity and truth, and demand in everything glare and excitement. These, having, as others, strong inherent religious tendencies, and being disgusted, so they tell us, with the coarseness and hardness of the popular evangelicism, find in the imaginative side of Catholicism many and powerful attractions.

3. I fear her advance again, because she has a never-failing ally in the priestly element of the Church of England. This is the Church amongst us, which, as things now are, must always determine the religious character of our age and country. Her influence overshadows us all. She is tolerant, and, therefore, we may assert our own individual liberty, and win and maintain our own ground; but it is in vain, for any great general effect, to strive against the tide that flows from this centre of the nation's religious life. Now, beyond all question, the sacerdotal element is the most living one among the clergy of that Church at the present time. Is it a truer Protestantism or political antagonism that has restrained its manifestation in Ireland? Evangelicism, so called, has had its day. The best minds, the most cultivated intellects, the purest tastes, and the most advanced literature, have unmistakeably refused to coalesce with it, and are found on the side of antiquity and authority with Dr. Pusey, or on that of simplicity and progress, with Arnold, Whately, Milman, Hare, and others. A former

lecturer, in this course, has shown you the origin, nature, and extent of Puseyism. He has proved to you that it is essentially Roman Catholicism, and that it has its root, defence, and strength in the standards of the English Church. You cannot doubt but that, so far as this evil spirit works, it works for Rome. And it does work, and will work, boldly and covertly, as the times will allow, but in some way to do its office. Now, I find it stated, that, within these few years, two thousand clergy of this school have been ordained to cures in the Church of England—thousands of the youth of the families of the nobles and gentry, who are to be our future rulers and leaders of the fashion in spiritual things, have gone out into society thoroughly imbued with the same principles. Some have gone over to Rome, but the rest remain. Have these men changed their principles in obedience to the popular outcry? Ah! do not think so meanly of them! The Bishop of Exeter tells them plainly to adhere to their principles, but to abandon for the present the practices at which weak Protestants, of whom, he is sorry to say, there are a great many, have been offended. There they are, and there, despite this agitation, they will remain. We may repeat of these Tractarians an anecdote of an honest country squire, in the reign of Charles—"Feeling puzzled by the controversies between the Calvinists and Arminians, he inquired what these Arminians held, and was answered, that they held most of the best livings in the Church of England."

I think there is truth in the remark I have somewhere seen, that we misinterpret the feeling of anger manifested by those in high places, in that Church, at the intrusion of the Roman Catholic episcopate, if we take it as a proof, so far as many of the bishops and clergy are concerned, of their real Protestant feeling. On the contrary, in their case, it is to be feared that it arises from their firm adherence to that very sacerdotal principle which is the direct foe of Protestantism, and, in truth, the real separative point between the Protestant and Roman Catholic idea of what constitutes a true Church. Why do we say this? If they are angry and offended at the presence of Roman Catholic bishops in their dioceses, is not that proof of their Protestant feeling and of their enmity to Rome? Of enmity to Rome, if you will, but not necessarily of Protestant feeling. It is a fundamental principle of the universal Church, according to the Puseyites, that there can be but one bishop in the diocese. In each diocese there can be but one centre, from which the supernatural stream of grace, that alone gives efficacy to the sacraments, can flow. If there be two within the same district, each assuming to be that sole centre, one must be of necessity schismatic. It is easy to see how this principle leaves room for episcopal anger at the intrusion of Rome, and yet, at the same

time, for a close adherence to that sacerdotal principle which is in its very nature anti-Protestant. Presbyterians, for instance, would rejoice to see the Independents adopt their form of government, although they did establish new and separate synods and presbyteries in the same district with themselves; but the Puseyite bishops and clergy, with all their warm sympathy with Romish doctrines, have no relish for the neighbourhood of Romish bishops. They feel that, on their principles, their own claims are thus pronounced invalid—their title to being the fountain of grace in that district is challenged—and they are sent away to antiquity to make out, if they can, an old British Church anterior, perhaps, to St. Augustine's mission to the white cliffs of Albion, and founded, perhaps, by St. Paul himself. Is there then no reason to fear that the priestly theory of a Church is deeply entrenched in the high places of spiritual influence in these countries, and that the Church of England, despite the soundness of the great body of her laity, will continue to nourish that idea of a mystical Church which is the strength and essence of the Roman Catholic religion?

4. Another ally that Rome has lies, as I think, in the strong tendency of all the great Protestant Churches of the land to rest religion on *authority*. The real contest is between authority and the reason and conscience of each individual. Whatever magnifies *authority*, and dwarfs the energy and narrows the rights of the individual soul, so far does the work of Rome. Now, I do not see that there is within the great Churches of the land freedom for the *individual* conscience. There is freedom for the Churches one of another, but what of the individual mind?

Obedience to the Church is practically enforced as a duty, and a want or weakness of allegiance to those that are over them in the Lord is held to be an impiety. I know what a flood of declamation could be let loose against this statement, and that I should be told that it is God's Word that is their only rule; but I say, practically, it is man's words for which that allegiance is claimed, when any man's or Church's *interpretation* of God's Word is made essential to salvation. Is it not a fact that, with an immense number of Protestants, it is considered a sin to admit a doubt as to any statement in Prayer-book or Catechism? Is it not a fact that these are often quoted by them as if they were God's Word itself? Proofs these, I say, how thoroughly Protestantism has worked for Rome by thus strengthening in the public mind the principle of obedience to the Church. In fact, these Churches, by placing salvation in the reception of abstruse creeds, necessitate the mass of men to take them on authority. As I understand a very prevalent idea of salvation:—Heaven is as an

estate devised in allotments to each believer, on condition that each allottee shall comprehend aright the legal terms of the will and testament in which it is devised. In such case, what would a wise man do? Why, repair to some learned scribe, and rest on his *authority* for a right interpretation. So, I say, has obedience to Church authority been made unavoidable by placing salvation in that which ignorant men—busy men—feel they have neither power nor leisure to make out for themselves. What remedy? Why, this remedy:—Admit that what is obscure cannot be what is revealed—reduce essentials to what he that runs may read, to what our Lord Himself and His Apostles reduced them—acceptance of Himself as the Messias, as the Lord of conscience and the Christ of God—make salvation to consist in nothing but a growing likeness to Christ—they that have the spirit of Christ are His, they that have not the spirit of Christ are none of His; and cut the ground from beneath Rome by resting religion not on other authority than Christ's, and the response which man's soul makes to His holiness, goodness, and love.

5. I must again, according to my light, charge the great Protestant Churches with helping to produce that state of mind in the religious world which is favourable to the progress of the Roman Catholic religion—in this, that they have thoroughly indoctrinated men with the notion that there is merit in believing hard things—that to crucify *reason* is something of the nature of crucifying *sin*, that what is easy to believe is not worth believing, and that any view of religion which approves itself to the natural reason and conscience is thus self-condemned as not the religion of God. This is just the state of mind wished for by Rome, and thus are the most effective weapons against her incredible things blunted and made of no avail. Reason and conscience must not speak against her with any confidence, for they are apt to turn round and lift a voice against Calvin's Decrees and Athanasian Trinities. The sword of the Spirit is the Word of God, I know and heartily believe. The Bible is the great instrument that will finally work Rome's overthrow—not the *material* Bible, however, but the meaning and spirit of the Bible.

Now, whether the Scriptures teach the doctrines of the Trinity, or Predestination, for example, or not, I am not here going to inquire. What I urge is, that the fact of Protestant Churches enforcing such doctrines blunts the weapon of reason against what they consider the absurdities and incredibilities of Rome; and that if any man, by bold and free, but prayerful examination—bold and free as regards man's authority, prayerful as regards God—comes to the conclusion that genuine Christianity is not pledged with her life for such doctrines, he will not merely feel his own faith in Christianity—breathe freer—but will feel his Protestantism bolder and firmer likewise. It is the old argument of Roman

Catholics against Protestants, and I have yet to learn how it is to be answered—Why object to the unreasonableness of Transubstantiation and yet maintain the reasonableness of the doctrine of the Trinity? Ask a Roman Catholic priest how he can persuade enlightened, educated Roman Catholics, to believe so incredible a doctrine as that of the real presence, and his answer will be—it is kept stereotyped for use—"We begin with the Athanasian Creed, and after that, all is easy enough." I know it is denied that the doctrine of the Trinity is an unreasonable doctrine, and that some have chivalrously, not wisely, as many think, undertaken to prove as much. There are not wanting those who are ready to do the same bold thing for that of Transubstantiation. I have thus, then, referred to some of those tendencies existing in a large class of minds amongst us, which account for, as I think, more than anything in our public policy, more than "Maynooth grants"—"precedence at levees"—or "Papal aggressions," for the progress of the Roman Catholic religion. It were easy to adduce instances of public credulity, and of religious fanaticism and extravagance even within Protestant circles, to show that we are by far too boastful of this our nineteenth century. The helpless state of spiritual dependence in which, through ignorance on the one hand and cowardly surrender of the rights of the soul on the other, multitudes are content to be—some not *able* to exercise their boasted right of private judgment, and others not *caring* or not *daring* to do it—may rather excite our surprise that this bold, aggressive, restless Church, does not gather from such whitened fields a far richer and more bountiful harvest. What is to be done, then? Men's minds are running on legal enactment. He were a wise man indeed who could devise a legal enactment to meet such a case. One thing, however, seems certain, that nothing shall be done to infringe on the religious liberty, that our Roman Catholic brethren shall be left free to make converts of us all, if they can so persuade us. It is gratifying to see how firm and deep the foundations of our religious liberties are laid. It is not by legislative enactments and penalties that Rome is to be opposed. She may, and does by such means, in countries where she has rule, keep down and root out Protestantism, but Protestantism cannot, even in her most criminal days could not, use those weapons with sufficient ruthlessness to be successful. Persecution defeats its own end unless it is extermination. Protestantism in her fiercest moods stopt short, thank God, and failed. Rome blenched not and succeeded.

Let every Protestant then abandon for ever the wild dream and wicked wish for any the slightest re-enactment of the penal laws. Never again give the foe of spiritual freedom freedom's cry—never again give the enemy of religious liberty liberty's

watchword. "By this," said Sir Robert Peel, on the introduction of the Emancipation Act, "we shall have dissolved the great moral alliance that has hitherto given strength to the cause of the Roman Catholics. We shall range on our side the illustrious authorities which have heretofore been enlisted upon theirs, and the rallying cry of civil liberty will then be all our own."

Not penal enactments then; plainly not. What then? A revision of the Prayer-book—the erasure of those portions behind which the Puseyites entrench themselves. As a Dissenter, I might say I hope not; for many a one have those things driven from the Church. As a Unitarian, I might say I hope not; for the Athanasian Creed has ever been our best tract read for us in all churches by public authority; but, as a Christian and Protestant, I would rejoice—not that any probable revision would enable us to conform, for the sufficient reason that their sincere belief is not our sincere belief—but that the palpable sight before men's eyes of such a body as that of the House of Commons altering, or confirming the alteration of the Prayer-book, and thus, deciding by vote what the National Church was henceforth to be, to do, and to believe, could not but throw men back upon their own convictions, compel the exercise of private judgment, and give a fatal blow to that principle of Church authority in religion, and weaken that feeling of obedience, which, as I have said, is one of Rome's great allies at the present time. But Churches are instinctively sensitive to anything that would weaken the prestige of their formularies and creeds. They know how much of their influence depends on the obscurity which the lapse of even three hundred years envelopes their origin, and they wisely shrink from a revision that would expose that origin to vulgar gaze. The Prayer-book, though on all hands we are told, even by clergymen, that there are things in it which they do not believe, yet read and sign—the Prayer-book will not be revised.

I need not say, my friends, that I have no new means to propose of staying the progress of the Roman Catholic Church. I know of none but the old-fashioned ones of the school, the press, reason, common sense, and the free, untrammelled use of Holy Scripture. If these will not suffice, what will or should avail?

If any feel alarm, let it not hurry him into any narrowing of his social sympathies or embittering of his feelings towards Roman Catholics. They are bound to do all they lawfully can to extend their faith. Their zeal should only increase his respect for them, and redouble his own to promote the cause of education and general enlightenment. Let no petty sectarian interest interfere, but let him co-operate with every man that will co-operate with him; and thus, even if his alarm should be exaggerated, it shall have directed his energies into right and

profitable channels. If any feel alarm, let him oppose the priestly spirit in every shape—in every guise; let him attack the sacerdotal idea everywhere; let it not lurk under the Geneva bands more than under the Roman or English surplice; if a layman, let him not leave the interests of religion to his clergy; let him assert his own individual liberty, the free rights of his own soul, and in whatever communion he is placed, battle for the rights of others.

If any man feel alarm at the progress of this religion of mystery, let him boldly, but prayerfully, examine God's Word, to see whether he is himself free as that Word from kindred mysteries that are traceable to the same source. We Unitarians think there are such doctrines in the great Protestant Church, and we frankly say it. We think this agitation should lead men to a renewed examination whether these things are so. We may be wrong in the results to which the exercise of our free inquiry has led us; but we think we are right, and we certainly feel quite impervious to the attacks of Rome. The Church of Scotland, and her kindred Churches, are free from the priestly idea of a Church which is doing such mischief in the English Establishment, and are so far safe; we think that another step from Rome, in our direction, would make her safer still.

The great want of our time, I submit to you, is a freer and bolder Protestantism. I say not, in this connexion, Unitarianism, but a freer and bolder adoption, lead where it may, of the great Protestant principle of the spiritual independence of each soul—independence of priest or Church of Luther's doctrine; that it is by its own faith, its own conviction, its own trust, its own apprehension of Christ, that the soul must be justified and saved. The strength of the sacerdotal Church lay in *this*, that men were justified by the *sacraments*, and that faith was the *fruit*, not the *instrument*, of salvation. This made the soul dependent on the Church, that is, the clergy. Luther's great and (in the spirit of it) true doctrine of Justification by Faith *alone*, strikes at the root of this priestly idea. It makes every man his own priest; but it implies the right and duty of free inquiry. It makes it inevitable that the Protestantism which has thus thrown us on our own convictions, that has thus cut us away from all priestly dependence, and left us alone with God, should frankly accept the consequences of her own act—should not shut us up for that justifying faith to this or other theology —should not be ashamed of her own children, but adopt, boldly and unreservedly, the truth that inevitably flows from her enfranchisement of private judgment, that no mere intellectual error can endanger the safety of a soul that is in the likeness of Christ. If it be not thus, thousands shall curse the day that

Luther broke their prison doors, and led them forth from bondage. Better far have left them in their spiritual Egypt, where, though their hearts might have grown fat by reason of the flesh-pots, they had, at least, on Protestant orthodoxy's own showing, the essentials of the saving creed. To make brick without straw is holiday pastime, compared to being led out into this wilderness of opinion without a living Moses to direct the perilous journey—compared to being sent to search in the theologian's bundle of "hay stubble," and, at the peril of salvation, for the magnetic needle that shall unerringly point out the saving dogmata. The *soul* is greater than the *Church*. As the Sabbath was made for man, and not man for the Sabbath, so the Church is man's creature and instrument — not his lord and master. Free Churches, then—free for the laity, free for the clergy, freedom, not merely for the body corporate, but freedom for the individual conscience—not merely for the majority, but for the minority as well—not merely for belief but for DOUBT—not merely to think right, as we may esteem right, but to think right as they themselves judge it. Is there such freedom in the great Protestant Churches of the land? Freedom to leave their communion, I admit; but even if a man could bring himself to break away from old ties and friends, there are other bonds that hold him fast, and the result, in innumerable cases, is, that men smother their doubts and questionings, leave them to fester and eat out the very life of faith from their souls.

But what floods of heresies would rush in if these old ramparts were thrown down, and each Church should cease sharply to define the doctrines which all in communion with them must, if they remain, find in Holy Scripture. Heresies! aye, to be sure! Their name is legion. But what right has Protestantism to talk of heresies? What is she but a great and glorious godborn heresy herself, and what is left for her but to look Rome boldly in the face and say, with the same great confidence that Paul did to the priestly party of his day—"Yes! after the way ye call heresy, so worship we the God of our fathers."

A man's doubts, brethren, may be as truly from God as his beliefs are. Luther's were such. A man's *faith* is not to be measured by the length of his creed. A man may be creedless, as Churches reckon creedless, and yet Christ not count him *faithless* but believing. A man's *faith* often *deepens* and *strengthens* as his creed *shortens*, and the true Word of God never so dawns upon the soul as when the words of man fade away.

"You tell me—Doubt is devil-born.
"I know not; one, indeed, I knew,
In many a subtle question versed,
Who touched a jarring lyre at first,
But ever strove to make it true.

"Perplex'd in faith, but pure in deeds,
At last he beat his music out,
There lives more faith in *honest* doubt,
Believe me, than in half their *creeds*.

"He fought his doubts and gather'd strength,
He would not make his judgment blind,
He faced the spectres of his mind,
And laid them; thus he came, at length,

"To find a stronger faith his own;
And power was with him in the night
Which makes the darkness and the light,
And dwells not in the light alone,

"But in the darkness and the cloud,
As over Sinai's peaks of old,
While Israel made their gods of gold,
Although the trumpet blew so loud."

"In Memoriam." Tennyson.

Aye—

"Israel made their gods of gold,
Although the trumpet blew so loud."

And if that awful trumpet of Jehovah availed not, it is not by trumpet blowing now, whether of Romish or Protestant Churches, that men's *doubts* are to be charmed into *faith*. They may be silenced by the clamour—they may fester into secret unbelief, even beneath the pulpit stairs or by the altar rails, where, if there had been a liberty of expressing them and a generous treatment of them, he that was thus "perplexed in faith" would have "beat his music out," faced the spectres of his mind, and yielded himself in willing fealty to Christ. The support and countenance won for religion by the pressure of Church authority, that smiles on meek submission and frowns on honest heresy, is much of it hollow and insincere, and, therefore, insulting to her true worth and dignity. It has generated a large class of men, who have come to look on religion as a political engine—a social institution—a national police agent; and the allegiance they give her rests not on her *truth*, but her *necessity* and her *utility*—not that they, high souls, need her! but others *do*. Let such speak honestly, and they would say of half the doctrines and practices of their Churches—"Ah! true; very right: these things are not very credible nor defensible—other views of religion are simpler and nobler—too simple, too noble. Human nature is a strange thing, and needs to be strangely provided for. The Church is the bulwark of the State—part and parcel of our glorious Constitution—and it is our duty as citizens to give it our countenance and support."

Let us protest—let all true Christians, of every sect, protest against any such insulting patronage. Let religion stand on

true ground, or let her fall. It is not because she is useful, helps the State, restrains men's passions, invests human laws with sanctions stronger than armed men, and holds together the social fabric which the wild wills of men might otherwise destroy —it is not for these reasons that we are to bow our heads in her august presence, but because she is true and is from God. Her sovereignty rests not on man's suffrage, but on God's appointment. "Ye have not chosen me; but I have chosen you." And unless there were true hearts innumerable in all sects that feel and yield to this spiritual call—if the Gospel had no better support than any which politicians, Churches, and creeds can give her—we should not be here to-night discussing the tendencies and fortunes of different forms of Christianity, but Christianity itself had long since perished from the world.

Protestantism, then, if she is to win her true and rightful ascendancy, must learn a wiser and more generous treatment of men's doubts, must get over her fear of heresy, must free her children from spiritual leading-strings, teach them self-dependence, and believe that the world is of an age for "strong meat." She must have faith in the great human heart she has herself awakened—must not imitate Rome in making the truth of one generation truth for ever—see that, though Jesus Christ is the same yesterday, to-day, and for ever, though the seminal ideas of Christianity are unchangeable, yet that the trees of righteousness that spring from these plantings of the Lord, all may, and do, nevertheless, vary with time and place; and, finally, that, as the wise Robinson said to his pilgrim children —God hath yet more truth to break forth from His Blessed Word. AMEN.

LECTURE FOR THE TIMES:

DELIVERED IN

THE MUSIC HALL, BELFAST,

ON THE EVENING OF WEDNESDAY, FEB. 19, 1851,

BY THE

REV. CHARLES JAMES M'ALESTER.

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[The following lecture was delivered in a great measure *extempore:* but a desire having been expressed that it should be printed, the substance of it is here given from memory, with the assistance of a few short notes. This circumstance will account for, and excuse, any minute variations which may be observed between the discourse as printed and that which was orally delivered at the Music Hall.]

A LECTURE FOR THE TIMES.

I APPEAR before you, on the invitation of a society, in whose efforts for the dissemination of Christian knowledge, I take a lively interest, to speak my thoughts on the religious aspect of the times; on the recent ecclesiastical appointments in England; their bearing on the cause of truth, freedom, and holiness, in the empire; and on topics of higher importance, which are naturally suggested by this all-absorbing subject. It is a task which I have undertaken reluctantly, because the matters to which I might be expected to draw your attention have been, during the last three months, the subject of multitudinous sermons from the pulpit, speeches from the platform, and articles from the press. But still more do I undertake the task with diffidence, because of the angry theological discussions that have been carried on, and the virulent anti-papal feelings that have been awakened in connexion with the question in many parts of England, and in some parts of our own island. That spirit of kindness, which for years had been cultivated between differing sects, and which it was the aim of an enlightened government to cherish, seems suddenly to have been extinguished, and we appear to be thrown back to that melancholy and, I will add, unchristian state of things, in which men regard each other with suspicion, and withhold the confidence of friendship—nay, sometimes even the courtesies of life, because they worship in different churches, and entertain conflicting theological views. It should be the effort of every man, who has the interests of his country, and the religion of Christ at heart, to resist this unhappy tendency, and to hold up for his own guidance and that of others around him, those genuine principles of freedom, those pure sentiments of charity, and those ennobling views of human life, which are so clearly enforced from the lips, and so beautifully illustrated in the life, of our Blessed Master.

Two questions suggest themselves to my mind as embracing what is most important in connexion with the ecclesiastical appointments which the Pope has thought fit to make in England; namely—How do they affect the civil and religious

freedom of the nation, and how do they bear on the spread of what we believe to be religious error, or the obstruction of what we prize as religious truth?

It is commonly alleged that these appointments have a tendency to trench on the civil and spiritual freedom of the people at large, and that Cardinal Wiseman, and the other dignitaries, have assumed authority over the bodies and souls of all who live within the limits of their prescribed jurisdiction. The Pope may have acted in a presumptuous spirit, and the appointments may themselves be informal, or illegal—that is a point I do not pretend to discuss; but for a priest or bishop to assume and to possess authority over his fellow-men are very different things. The homage which they receive is a *voluntary* homage. And if even a Protestant willingly abandons his principles, and gives spiritual allegiance to the Cardinal or the Pope, we must regret the change, but we have no right to prevent it. These appointments, however unwisely they may have been made, seem to have been regarded as desirable for the more effectual administration of the affairs of the Church of Rome in England; and it is a mockery to talk of religious toleration—religious freedom I should say, for I dislike the word *toleration*—in these countries, if the Romish Church, or any other, be not at liberty to appoint pastors and teachers whenever and wherever they please.

But it is objected that there is a danger of the Roman Catholic church becoming dominant in these lands, and then farewell to the freedom which we now enjoy under the fostering care of a Protestant Queen and a Protestant government! I cannot see that the multiplying of bishops, or a change in their titles, necessarily extends the limits of the church, and brings increasing numbers within its fold; but let us look at the matter in the *very worst* point of view, and suppose—what in my mind there is no shadow of reason to apprehend—that the Roman Catholics should increase with fearful rapidity, and outnumber the various Protestant churches in the country, it does not follow that they would oppress and persecute their fellow subjects. We are too apt to associate with the Romish faith those atrocities which in a darker age were perpetrated in the name of that religion, and with the sanction of those who professed to be its anointed priests. It is not fair to judge of that religion, or any other, by what it has been in earlier times or less enlightened lands. Tried thus, which of the present prevailing forms of Christianity must not be condemned? Notwithstanding a common boast that the Romish church is unchangeable, I believe that, like the members of all other churches, its people have changed, and that the millions of that faith who now dwell in these lands would shrink with

horror from the massacre of St. Bartholomew, or the foul and bloody deeds of the Inquisition. And sad and dismal as are the records of that church, linked as it generally has been with political despotism, we should not forget that there are some green spots, some redeeming facts on which the mind delights to dwell. Among the adherents of that church there have been found, from time to time, zealous and noble champions of religious freedom; and it is to the honour of the Roman Catholic faith, that, when neither on the continent of Europe, nor in England, had freedom a home, under the benign influence of a Roman Catholic nobleman, an asylum was opened in America for the persecuted of every Christian sect. Under the mild and Christian sway of Lord Baltimore, the constitution of Maryland was settled in the most liberal spirit: the Roman Catholics who were oppressed by the laws of England found there a peaceful asylum; "and there too," as the historian informs us, "Protestants were sheltered against Protestant intolerance."

But the genius of all establishments is less or more oppressive. We err in supposing that our present liberties, invaluable as I feel them to be, are traceable to our Protestant establishment. If we associate persecution, as we justly do, with the reign of Mary, are there no painful associations with that of her Protestant sister—no foul stains to dim the splendour of a reign which has been rendered signally glorious by its maritime discoveries and its naval conquests? History tells us, that during the period that Elizabeth swayed the British sceptre, no less than one hundred and eighty lives were sacrificed to the fell spirit of persecution; not to speak of the multitudes that were plundered, or thrown into prison, and the larger numbers that tore themselves from their native land, and sought on the other side of the Atlantic "freedom to worship God." Of later monarchs too, much might be said to show that neither they, nor the Protestant establishment of which they have been the spiritual head, have been the friends of freedom. We owe our present liberties not to any church, but to the gradual development of the country, its mind and its resources, through the spread of knowledge, the cultivation of science, the increase of commerce, and the rise of manufactures. These have been, I conceive, the great instrumentalities, under the direction, I admit, of Christianity, by which we have been raised from the despotism under which our ancestors lived, to the enlarged freedom which we now enjoy. As the people by degrees began to know their rights, they wrung instalment after instalment from the ruling powers; and two of those measures that have tended chiefly to secure the people's rights have been only recently obtained. I allude to the repeal of the Test and

Corporation Act in 1828, and that measure of justice to the Roman Catholics which was passed in 1829, and which is now known in history as the Catholic Relief Bill; and we should remember that the chief opponents of these reasonable concessions were ministers and members of our boasted Protestant establishment.

Neither does it follow, that if our Protestant Church, as by law established, should fall, a Romish Church would rise upon its ruins. That there are symptoms of its dissolution many reflecting minds believe. The treachery that manifests itself within its bosom is perhaps the most striking symptom of its tottering condition. The secessions that have taken place from its ranks to swell the numbers and importance of a church which it has always pronounced as idolatrous, have created just alarm among its friends, from the Prime Minister himself down to the humblest church-going person in the community. But there is another alarming symptom less striking, yet destined, perhaps, to work more lasting injury. Its laity are outgrowing its formularies and its canons. Many of its members have no sympathy with its Athanasian Creed, its form of Absolution in the Order for the Visitation of the Sick, its professed power of communicating the Holy Ghost to its priests at Ordination, and other matters which show too plainly its near connexion with that church towards which, till lately, all its members have been in an attitude of the fiercest hostility. The present establishment, then, may fall; but if it do, it is only, I believe, that Protestantism may assume a nobler form—that the glorious principles of religious freedom which, originating in the Reformation, have been more clearly expounded and more consistently vindicated in later times, may be fully carried out; and that under their benign influence men may enjoy all freedom, social, political, religious, be they Roman Catholic or Protestant, Episcopalian or Presbyterian, Jew or Gentile.

I argue, then, that these ecclesiastical arrangements, on the part of the Pope, seem to give no reasonable ground for alarm, as far as our civil and religious freedom is concerned; but should any infringement—the very smallest—be made on the liberties of these lands by the Pope or any of his functionaries —a flame would speedily be kindled in England, Scotland, yes, and in Ireland too, more extended and more enduring than that which the recent letter to the Bishop of Durham created. The spirit that nerved the arms of our fathers to vindicate their rights, and drive the demon of civil and religious despotism from our shores, would at once be awakened, and would overwhelm the vile efforts of ungrateful and treacherous men, who would sacrifice the soul of a nation to the interests of their church.

I now address myself to the second question:—How do these appointments bear on the spread of what we believe to be religious error, or the obstruction of what we prize as religious truth? Whether the Roman Catholic religion has been making much way in England of late years, I am not able to state; but the public papers announce, from time to time, that men high in position, and more than respectable in education, have renounced their Protestantism and embraced Popery. However anomalous and inexplicable I feel these changes to be, I do not see how they can be prevented by an Act of Parliament. It is obvious that we must adopt some other means of rebutting error and advancing what we regard as truth, than legal enactments. The cause of Christian truth must be maintained in another arena than our legislative halls. The history of the Established Church in Ireland abundantly exhibits the utter impotency of law and government patronage to sustain and extend any particular form of religion. The very effort, on the part of those in authority, to check the progress of opinions by the infliction of pains and penalties, becomes, under a gracious Providence, the most effectual means of promoting them. What is there that casts such lustre on any system of religion, Catholic or Protestant, Trinitarian or Unitarian, as the confessors that have endured, and the martyrs that have bled for them?

Neither do I believe that any good is to be accomplished by the theologian buckling on his armour, and going out to do battle against Roman Catholic error—drawing arguments from this Father and from that Council, from this plain text of an Evangelist, and that dark word of Prophecy, to prove that Rome is false, and the worship of the Virgin is a sin. This war has been too long waged, and its sad fruits are everywhere apparent. That it is the right and duty of every man to seek for the truth, and, as far as he can, to advance it, I readily admit; but controversy about mere opinions has for ages held too prominent a place in the Christian Church; and the melancholy result has been, that men have been led to attach all importance to the creed they believe, or the church in which they worship, and too little value to the condition of their hearts, and the character of their lives. Christianity, a soul-inspiring and a life-directing religion, has been reduced to little more than a dry creed, or a hollow profession. Ministers of religion and ministers of state have aimed rather to promote speculative doctrines, than to cherish the spirit of that faith which prompts us "to do justice, to love mercy, and to walk humbly with our God." To carry out these heartless views, the principles of equity—nay, the feelings of humanity, have been often sacrificed. Witness the efforts that were made on the part of Spain

and Portugal to extend the Catholic religion in the new world, and the iniquitous measures that were adopted in past times to perpetuate in these lands the religion that happened for the time to be ascendant! And this same disposition exhibits itself in our own day. The more enlarged views of justice which prevail have greatly moderated it, but where opportunity offers, we see the various sects pushing, by questionable or wicked means, the creed which they believe—forgetting, as they plainly do, that in advancing the creed, they may destroy the spirit of Christianity. One or two illustrations of this undue attachment to mere opinions present themselves to my mind, in connexion with our own country and our own times. We all remember the fearful famine which smote this land a few years ago. In the west of Ireland multitudes were perishing for want of food. The Christian liberality of those who had the means, was generously exercised to relieve the distress of their unfortunate fellow-creatures. But to some, this awful condition of the people seemed a favourable opportunity of making proselytes to their own faith; nay, it was even alleged, so familiarly do some men appear to be acquainted with the ways of Providence, that this desolation had settled on the land to afford an entrance for Protestantism into the benighted regions of the west. Accordingly, in some cases parties came offering food to those who were starving, on condition that they should listen to the reading of the Scriptures, and allow their children to be catechised. I would that the Scriptures were widely circulated and read everywhere; but it cannot be right to use means so objectionable, even to secure so great a good.

Again, there is, in connexion with your own town, a noble building reared for the philanthropic object of educating the deaf and dumb, and the blind. This institution is, I believe, munificently supported, and most efficiently conducted; but the pupils who are admitted must submit to be educated agreeably to the standards of the Church of England, or the Church of Scotland. Thus Roman Catholics, or others, who may have children born deaf or blind, must either let them grow up in the grossest ignorance, or sacrifice for secular advantages those religious principles which they value as the truth of God.

This excess of zeal for the spread of mere opinions has penetrated everywhere, and seems to have been the great source of those difficulties that have arisen in the government of our country. Each party, aiming at the extension of its own views, looks with suspicion on any measure that does not give a hope of accomplishing that end. The history of our National Education, during the last twenty years, illustrates this fact. The government, actuated, I believe, by the best motives, desired to plan a system of instruction for the people which

might be more generally acceptable than that which had previously existed. The matter of religion was their great difficulty; and, instead of letting that delicate point alone, and leaving spiritual instruction to the appointed teachers of religion, they endeavoured to engraft the grand leading facts of Revelation on their course of teaching, and allowed prescribed days or hours for the reading of the Scriptures. Such a mode of proceeding is never dreamed of in the great public schools throughout the country, to which the children of the higher classes resort; but some such plan seemed necessary to satisfy the various sects. The consequence was that the arrangements met the wishes of the Roman Catholics, but were violently opposed by the Protestants. When, however, a system of collegiate education, based on the very same principles, was more lately introduced, it was welcomed by the Protestants generally as a boon, and forthwith it is rejected by the Roman Catholics as a godless institution.

This striving between sects has mixed itself up in almost every plan that has been devised for the amelioration of our country, and it has produced its legitimate fruits. Men seem to care more about the spread of certain opinions than the promotion of "righteousness, peace, and joy, in the Holy Ghost." Thus, at this time, the whole country is thrown into excitement respecting the alleged aggression which has been made on the Church of England. From Sunday to Sunday it is the subject of discourse in many a pulpit, and every one is anxious to know what steps the Parliament will take in reference to this momentous matter; while, at the same time, the most flagrant violations of christian duty are passed over almost unheeded. It is not long since our arms were engaged with alternate success and defeat in India, and achieved signal conquests in China. In these campaigns multitudes were butchered, and yet hardly a whisper was heard of the cruelties of war: on the unchristian character of the conflicts our pulpits were silent. Nor were the events noticed at all, except, perhaps, in form of a Thanksgiving offered by authority for victories achieved, and men and brethren slaughtered; while, on the battlements of the enemy, waved a blood-stained banner that had been consecrated by a christian minister in the name of the Prince of Peace.

Some one of great or little fame—it may be the curate of a country parish, or some one high in office at Oxford—has passed over to the Roman Catholic Church—all the neighbourhood is in amazement and alarm, because he has renounced the Reformed Faith, and embraced the damnable doctrines of the Romish Church: while more than one—many, distinguished for their mental endowments, and large means of usefulness, have become the victims of intemperance—their health,

character, reason, religion have been destroyed, and hardly a remark is made. Multitudes of our fellow men around us are, from year to year, sacrificed at the shrine of Drunkenness; and men, Christian men, seem to regard it as a matter of course, and make no effort to stay the evil. It appears plain to me, that in proportion as men have magnified into undue importance peculiar doctrinal tenets, and have laboured by all means, fair and unfair, to disseminate them, they have become indifferent to those great moral and religious duties which are the essence and true value of Christianity.

But what now shall we do to repel the incursions of Popery, which, as some imagine, threatens to overspread England, and press all into its service? While I would not meet its aggression by penal enactments, because they are powerless—and if they were potent, they are unjust—neither would I desire to attack it in a bitter controversial spirit. I would rather raise the Roman Catholic, and the Protestant of every sect, above mere sectarian views, and strive that we should all be baptized in the spirit of Christ: a spirit of piety to God, and love to our fellow-men; a spirit of self-denial, and self-sacrifice for the relief of the destitute, the succour of the tempted, and the recovery of the sinner. The Roman Catholic priest has much influence over his flock by the character of his religion, which is imposing in its forms, and authoritative in its dogmas. But his influence does not lie solely here: he is often devoted heartily to his duty, and ready to undergo all privation, and encounter all danger, that he may minister to the temporal and spiritual wants of the humblest of his flock. During the prevalence of the cholera in the West of Ireland, while the Protestant clergyman sometimes shrunk from the chamber of disease, the priest might be seen in the dead hour of night passing through the wards of the hospital, or visiting the damp cellar, that he might soothe the suffering, or minister consolation to the dying. It is cheering, amid all that is erroneous and corrupt in that ancient church, to contemplate the earnest devotedness to duty which is often conspicuous in its votaries. Let us be careful to cultivate in our own minds, and exhibit in our own lives, that Christian spirit which sustains piety, and moves to love and forbearance, which strengthens us against temptation, and directs us in the path of righteousness, and we shall do far more towards recommending our religious views, be they what they may, than by fluently quoting Scripture texts, and railing against our neighbour's creed.

But, it may be asked—Do you attach no importance to opinions, or do you think all opinions alike acceptable to the Deity? I believe that a man's christianity consists not in the mere doctrines which he holds, but in the spirit of Christ

renewing his mind, and leading him to holy, loving, and devout thoughts—to upright, beneficent, and self-denying acts. I can therefore recognise the Christian spirit in many a man of every sect. In the Roman Catholic Church, there is, among many others, Fenelon, whose virtues have been recorded for the admiration of the world; and Theobald Mathew, whose name is reverenced by varying sects, and whose labours have been blessed in the partial regeneration of our unfortunate country. And in Protestant churches you can recall to your minds a goodly array of worthies, whose devotedly Christian lives have imparted a sanctity to their creed more real and enduring than volumes of theological lore. I think there may be, in men of different churches, a unity of feeling and purpose, and that though here, seeing "but as through a glass darkly," they may entertain conflicting opinions, they will be united in heaven hereafter. My soul revolts against the Athanasian Creed which is read in the Romish and English churches, and the Athanasian spirit which prevails in the Church of Scotland. By that creed, men are continually pronouncing everlasting destruction on their fellow-men and fellow-christians; nay, often on their own parents, or their own kindred. By that creed men are continually consigning to perdition those whose lives have shed a lustre on humanity, and vindicated the truth and power of Christ's gospel. But it is not true; reason rejects it; the human heart rebels against it; even those, many of them, who undertake to read it, are ashamed of its propositions, and more ashamed of its spirit. Christianity in the letter and the spirit is against it, and we can receive its denunciations with no other feeling than pity for those who give them utterance. Our Saviour never teaches us, neither do his apostles, that we shall be judged for our mere opinions. Turn to the Sermon on the Mount, and hear the exposition of the Christian's duties and responsibilities there; hear Him, when sometimes to his disciples, and sometimes to thronging multitudes who eagerly listened to his words, He preaches the kingdom of God. Where, I ask, is there to be found there, the denunciatory tone of human creeds? Or listen to the Redeemer when he gives a graphic description of the last great day of account, and represents all nations as standing before his throne. It is not there for their opinions, but for their lives that they are judged. And those, therefore, seem to me to be making the true preparation for that momentous scene, who are giving themselves earnestly and devotedly to the cultivation of a Christian spirit, and the performance of Christian acts.

I do not then condemn my neighbours, or withhold from them the christian name, because they hold opinions on specu-

lative points, different from those which I entertain. And yet, I never felt my own views to be more important or consolatory than at the present time.

These views are important, because they lead me away from all human authorities, and bring me directly to the Fountain of Religious Truth. The question of authority is now agitating the great churches of the land. One and another boast of their antiquity, and go back, as they fancy, in an unbroken line to the apostles themselves: while each contradicts the other all cannot be true. In nature we have no authoritative teachers. The glorious revelation of God is spread out in the heavens above and the earth on which we tread; and we use the reason that God has given us in the interpretation of these magnificent pages. Aids we have in those who have lived before us, and in many who are our cotemporaries; but there is no scholar, nor scientific association, to dictate to us what we shall think of this star or that comet, of this insect or that mineral, and threaten us with perdition if we venture to differ from them. So we have the precious revelation of the gospel set forth in the life and words of our divine Redeemer, and in the inspired writings of his followers; and, turning away from the councils and canons of Rome, from the articles and formularies of the English church, from the confession and catechisms of the church of Scotland, except so far as these may assist our inquiries, we would come directly to the Holy Scriptures, and humbly seek, in the exercise of our reason—what are the truths that are taught, and the duties that are inculcated therein?

These views are important for another reason. Much has been said about the spread of the Roman Catholic faith. I think there is more ground for alarm, vastly more, from the spread of sceptical and infidel opinions in Roman Catholic and Protestant countries of the continent, in many parts of England and Scotland, and, though to a less extent, in Ireland. This has for some time presented itself to me as the great ground of apprehension in our day; and to meet this evil, the result, perhaps, to some extent, of education, our views—I mean the views generally held by Unitarian Christians—appear exactly suited. It has been sometimes scornfully remarked of Unitarianism that it is the high road to infidelity; but I believe it will yet prove the blessed instrumentality under God of stemming the tide of unbelief, and repelling the shafts that are pointed against the citadel of Christian truth.

When the man whose mind has been exercised in the pursuit of scientific knowledge, and accustomed to reason acutely on every subject, comes to study Christianity, he goes, we

may suppose, to the Church of Rome, and is introduced to the doctrine of Transubstantiation. He perceives at once that, though the "faithful" may receive it, it is utterly opposed to reason and to common sense, and he must reject it. He then passes over to the Church of England, and his attention is directed to the doctrine of the Trinity, as set forth in the Athanasian creed. He cannot pause long there: its statements, so strange and mysterious, that some have alleged, with what truth I cannot say—that it was written not to expound the doctrine, but to expose its absurdity—must be rejected too. He then seeks Christianity as it is exhibited in the standards of the Church of Scotland. He has been accustomed to contemplate God in the bountiful arrangements of his providence, diffusing happiness everywhere through the innumerable tribes of animated existence; but there he is startled to find set forward, in the plainest language, the fearful doctrine, that the great majority of mankind are predestinated to eternal death! It is no wonder that the inquiring mind, finding such doctrines as these put forward as essential parts of Christianity, should turn away and give himself up to the heartlessness of unbelief. I think it was John Wesley, who, preaching against Election and Reprobation, is said to have declared, "that he would rather believe the Bible untrue than God unjust."

We believe that such doctrines are no part of Christianity, and that the religion of the Gospel, properly understood, will be found to correspond with nature correctly interpreted; and while reason, however carefully exercised, never could have unfolded to us the precious truths of Revelation, yet these truths will be found to harmonize with the principles of common sense. The same Being who sent his Son to be our Saviour also formed this beautiful world in which we live, lighted up the lamp of reason within us, and endowed us with those feelings and affections which constitute our moral nature. The God of Truth cannot contradict himself, and what he teaches in one revelation of Himself, he will not oppose in another.

We perceive in the study of God's works abundant evidences of his being and of his unity; we turn to Scripture, and we find his unity inculcated in the Jewish religion (it is a doctrine which the Jews to this day strictly hold), and we hear our Saviour declaring, "The Lord our God is one Lord." Many things in nature bespeak the goodness of the Deity: the earth teeming with life, and furnished with material for the sustenance of those who dwell upon it; the varying seasons; the alternation of day and night; the relations of home, and kindred, and friendship. Yet there are some things that seem irreconcilable with the goodness of the Creator. We sometimes see

one distinguished for his virtue, and eminently useful in life, suddenly laid on a bed of lingering pain, or prematurely sinking into the silence of the grave. Our Saviour vindicates God's character for goodness, scatters those doubts that are awakened within the soul, and, revealing God's paternal character and the immortality of man, teaches us that even by suffering and disappointment the highest and holiest purposes of our being may be accomplished.

The soul of man is formed for devotion, and it has been justly observed that there seems to be no nation in which some religious manifestation does not exist. Christ directs us to pay our devotions to the one supreme God; not to Three Persons, but to One Person—the Father. His disciples on one occasion, knowing that John the Baptist had given his followers directions on the subject of prayer, came to him and besought him that he would teach them to pray. It was then he gave them that simple and comprehensive form of prayer known as the Lord's Prayer, and said, "when ye pray say, Our Father who art in Heaven;" and, as if anticipating that men might pray to himself as well as to his Father, he afterwards said, "In that day ye shall ask me nothing; whatsoever ye ask the Father in my name, I will do."

Our Saviour again teaches us that we have sinned, and a calm and careful examination of our heart and life will satisfy us that we are sinners. He sets forth repentance as the only condition on which our sins will be forgiven. Does not this doctrine harmonize with the feelings which God has implanted in our own hearts? Is there a parent, whose child has transgressed his authority, if the child comes sobbing confession of his fault, and seeking his parent's forgiveness and blessing, is he not at once forgiven? How true to the best feelings of our nature is the parable of the Prodigal Son! and this parable was spoken by our Lord to show forth God's relation to the sinner, and his readiness to pardon him when he repents.

But it may be objected that something more than repentance is needed in order to secure God's favour, else what need of the Saviour's sufferings and death on the cross? The crucifixion of our Lord is the most touching and momentous event in all the Sacred History, and it is to it and the atonement effected thereby, that all christians turn with the most sad yet grateful feelings. Jesus suffered, "the just for the unjust," but he suffered "to bring us to God," "to reconcile us to God," "to give repentance to his people." The great object of Christ's death then was to effect repentance; not to change the mind of God, or turn his wrath to love, but to change that which alone has need of change: the heart of man with its rebellious thoughts and its unholy passions.

So I might show that the doctrine of a future life, however beyond the unaided reason of man to establish, is yet entirely in harmony with our rational nature.

Then, turning to the duties of Christianity, we find them plain and intelligible, however difficult alas! we feel it to act them out in our lives. How beautifully the Saviour inculcates love to our neighbour in the parable of the Good Samaritan; showing us that no distinction of creed should prevent us from exercising kindness and good feeling towards our fellow-men! They may differ from us most widely in their religious opinions, but yet they are our neighbours, our brethren. There may be those who would revile us, persecute us, and speak evil against us falsely; even then, we should strive to repress feelings of anger, and "overcome evil with good." Contemplate the forgiving spirit of our Master, when the Roman soldiers were rudely driving the nails through his innocent hands, his lips were in prayer, and hear the words which he utters, "Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do!"

I believe that these views of Christianity are suited to silence the objections of the unbeliever, and give peace and comfort to his mind. I believe they are destined yet to prevail in the world. In this, however, I may be wrong. I would not speak presumptuously, or teach dogmatically; but I am sure that the spirit of love and forbearance which is associated with them, ought to prevail and triumph over all the dissensions that have disgraced our country and stifled the spirit of Christ's religion. And much as I desire the spread of what I consider the truth, I desire far more earnestly that Christians of various sects would learn to live in peace and love, co-operating in those plans and institutions which tend to spread knowledge, to mitigate suffering, and to banish sin.

Let me conclude with a quotation from one whose name is revered, and whose works are read by men of all churches—one who, though valuing Unitarianism, and defending it with his eloquent pen, yet valued more highly, and defended, if possible, more ably the Christian spirit which animates the good of every church. Speaking in an assembly similar, I presume, to that which it has been my privilege this evening to address, he says—

"My friends, I know that I am addressing those who hold various opinions as to the controverted points of theology. We have grown up under different influences. We bear different names. But if we purpose solemnly to do God's will, and are following the precepts and example of Christ, we are one church, and let nothing divide us.

Diversities of opinion may incline us to worship under different roofs, or diversities of taste or habit, to worship with different forms. But these varieties are not schisms; they do not break the unity of Christ's church. We may still honour, and love, and rejoice in one another's spiritual life and progress, as truly as if we were cast into one and the same unyielding form. God loves variety in nature and in the human soul, nor does he reject it in Christian worship. In many great truths, in those which are most quickening, purifying, and consoling, we all, I hope, agree. There is, too, a common ground of practice, aloof from all controversy, on which we may all meet. We may all unite hearts and hands in doing good, in fulfilling God's purposes of love towards our race, in toiling and suffering for the cause of humanity, in spreading intelligence, freedom, and virtue, in making God known for the reverence, love, and imitation of his creatures, in resisting the abuses and corruptions of past ages, in exploring and drying up the sources of poverty, in rescuing the fallen from intemperance, in succouring the orphan and widow, in enlightening and elevating the depressed portions of the community, in breaking the yoke of the oppressed and enslaved, in exposing and withstanding the spirit and horrors of war, in sending God's Word to the ends of the earth, in redeeming the world from sin and woe. The angels and pure spirits who visit our earth, come not to join a sect, but to do good to all. May this universal charity descend on us, and possess our hearts; may our narrowness, exclusiveness, and bigotry, melt away under this mild celestial fire! Thus we shall not only join ourselves to Christ's Universal Church on earth, but to the Invisible Church, to the innumerable company of the just made perfect, in the mansions of everlasting purity and peace."

LECTURE FOR THE TIMES:

DELIVERED IN

THE MUSIC HALL, BELFAST,

ON THE EVENING OF WEDNESDAY, FEB. 26, 1851,

BY

THE REV. JOHN SCOTT PORTER.

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LECTURE FOR THE TIMES.

ROMANS xiv. 22.

"Hast thou faith? Have it to thyself before God."

Nothing can be simpler than the meaning of this text, when read in the light of an humble and obedient will. It teaches that every man should hold his own conscientious views of religious truth and duty in the sight of God—therefore sincerely, unfailingly, unwaveringly, as in the Great Master's eye: but hold them to himself, as his own rule, not a law for others—to be earnestly wrought out in his own life, not to be imposed upon his brethren, nor any of them. If he thinks they have not got the truth, or not the whole of it, or have got hold of more than the truth, let him love them still; let him pray for them and for himself; let him reason with them if they are willing to listen to reason. Let him not hate them, nor persecute them, nor scold them, nor excommunicate them, nor damn them.

This is the scriptural and apostolic rule, which, as a strenuous Protestant I feel bound to maintain, and upon which I am desirous of acting. Strenuous Protestant as I am, I feel bound to give to the Roman Catholic Church, as well as others, the benefit of this principle, considered as a duty incumbent upon myself; but in doing so, I must claim from them the fulfilment of the same duty, as a law which they themselves admit to be binding upon their consciences. I mean to apply this principle to the recent agitation arising out of what is called the "Papal Aggression," as well as to the aspect of the Religious World in general.

As a Protestant, I hold a certain faith. It is my duty to

"have it to myself before God." I admit, therefore, that I have no right to make this faith of mine a law to my Roman Catholic brethren. If they think they cannot enjoy all the privileges of a regularly organised church without diocesan bishops, I admit their right to have them. If they are of opinion they can get them nowhere but at Rome, let them go to Rome for them. I think them wrong in both points; no matter for that: they think they are right; and in religious as in all other matters, every man is bound to act as he thinks right. But what I complain of is, that in this, as in many other things, Rome does not concede my right to act upon my convictions, when these differ from her decisions. She assumes a right to legislate for me and all baptized persons, and brands as heretics or as not-Christians, such of them as refuse to comply with her requirements. She has often done this, and she does it still. Nevertheless, I do not view with unmixed sorrow, the course which Pope Pius has adopted. I believe it has given a very salutary impulse to the public mind upon matters of vital interest to the Christian faith; and that both in the Roman Catholic Church and out of it, this stirring of the waters will do good.

The Pope has deliberately chosen to do a thing which, if required for the good of the Roman Catholics in this country (and, of that, I admit, *they themselves must be allowed to be the sole judges*), could have been done without giving any reasonable ground of offence, in such a manner as necessarily to arouse the indignation and excite the alarm of all other denominations. He has conferred the title of Archbishop of Westminster on Cardinal Wiseman, and nominated to certain sees (which he has created for the purpose), twelve other prelates, who had hitherto exercised episcopal functions in England as his Vicars Apostolical, and that, I believe, is all the good to Catholicism that he had in view. Of course, he knows that these titles are a mere nullity by the law of England. They confer no legal pre-eminence or power on the persons who bear them. They never will be acknowledged as valid by any but Catholics. The bull conferring them does not add a farthing to the revenues of the Catholic Church. It does not bring a single individual under its control. It gives, so far as I can understand it, the newly-appointed bishops no new authority even over Roman Catholics. The old districts marked out by the Pope, are now converted into new dioceses by his authority, and bishops are set over them instead of vicars apostolical, and that is all. It is a mere change of name, with a small increase of number. I can see nothing in the measure more important than a simple alteration of titles borne by certain persons who were, before the change was made, as much

the Pope's delegates, the creatures of his power, and the ministers of his will, as they are at present. And for this *childish* object—I can give it no more dignified epithet—he has roused the slumbering zeal of many Protestants who were—under the influence of not unworthy feelings—inclined, *perhaps too much inclined*, to let Pope and Popery alone, trusting to time and advancing civilization to open the eyes of Roman Catholics to the errors of their church, and to preserve the members of their own communion from being seduced by her arts or her arguments. For this childish object he has given new life and energy to those Protestants who were always the bitter and uncompromising foes of Rome, and has secured for them—what they were, in many instances, beginning to find it somewhat difficult to obtain—a willing, a favourable, and enthusiastic auditory. For this he has called forth against himself and his church the indignation of the great body of Protestants throughout the wide-spread British empire; indignation not the less real, nor the less to be regarded, because it may, in some quarters, be accompanied by fears for the safety of our Civil and Religious Liberties, greater than the actual circumstances of the case will warrant. About four months have elapsed since the Rescript of Pio Nono and Dr. Wiseman's Pastoral were made known in these countries; and during that time, multitudes of keen-sighted eyes have been searching into the records of the past, where, as enlightened Roman Catholics are well aware—and as many of them have regretfully acknowledged—is to be found many a document of Rome's folly and guilt in ancient times; many a tale of juggling imposture (*pious frauds*, as they are by a strange misnomer called); many a narrative of gross pollution, fraud, sacrilege, abominable lusts, openly indulged in by those whose duty should have led them to be examples of holiness to the world—aye, and many a bloody history of treachery, murder, massacre—not only not reproved, but applauded by the highest authorities in the Romish Church, because perpetrated with the view of extending its power, and cutting off those who had renounced its doctrines and cast off its allegiance. And many a doctrine, many an ordinance, and many a principle still retained in the Romish Church, that might otherwise have remained buried "in religious gloom," has been dragged forward into the light—which it is ill qualified to bear—and after its rottenness has been publicly exposed, has been thrown into the teeth of the new created hierarchy, with every expression of loathing and disgust.

It pleased Dr. Wiseman some time ago to represent the indignation excited by the Papal Rescript, as an outbreak of clerical partisanship;—it was, he said, "gradually subsiding

into a mere clerical and parochial movement:"* and the clergy of the Church of England were at the bottom of it all; and the cardinal evidently hoped that the agitation would speedily die out. My observation of what was passing in the world around me, does not bear out Dr. Wiseman's opinion. The indignation and alarm are by no means confined to the clergy of the Church of England, and they are very far as yet from having died out. They have extended to men of every profession, and of almost every rank.

The *alarm*, I think, is greater than any danger to be apprehended from the Pope's measure will justly warrant. But although the danger be but trifling, I cannot say that the public indignation is altogether misplaced; for in effecting an object in itself most trivial—scarcely worthy of notice, and certainly if it had been modestly and prudently carried out, not calculated to excite apprehension—the Pope and his advisers have been pleased to put forward pretensions, and to assert claims, which cannot be assented to, without putting all our liberties and privileges as a nation at the feet of a foreign government, and that a government of the very worst kind, *a government of priests*—a government, too, proverbial among despotisms for its enormous ignorance in political matters, its gross abuses, its notorious corruptions, and almost inconceivable intolerance. That such are, and have been for centuries, the characteristics of the civil government of Rome, I suppose there is not a Roman Catholic layman in the United Kingdom, knowing anything at all about the matter, who will not readily admit. That nothing could be more degrading and intolerable to this nation than to hold our lives, properties, and liberties at the mere will and sufferance of such a wretched government, I am sure is the opinion of my Roman Catholic countrymen, not less decidedly than it is mine. That such a government, hated by its own subjects, despised by the foreign powers on whom it depends for its very existence as a government—a bye-word, a proverb, and a scoff among the political institutions of the world—should, in conferring a few empty titles on some of its agents in these countries, have dared to assert a right to overrule and abrogate laws enacted by the Sovereign, the Lords, and Commons of Great Britain; to set the Acts of our Imperial Parliament aside—to pronounce them null, void, and of no effect, and to abolish, by a stroke of the pen, all the rights which they confer—is indeed an insult to the nation and the sovereign, calculated to excite the deepest indignation in the breast of every patriot, be he Protestant or be he Catholic; and would suffice to awaken the most intense alarm, if the source where it ema-

* See Dr. Wiseman's "*Appeal*," (not his "*Pastoral*."

nates were not, as a political power, unspeakably contemptible. For in his *Motu Proprio*, or Letters Apostolical, Bull, Rescript, or whatever it is called, the Bishop of Rome was not contented with conferring upon Dr. Wiseman, Dr. Ullathorne, and others, the titles which he wishes them henceforth to bear, and which they will henceforth no doubt bear at his own court, and among those who acknowledge his spiritual authority, but has, in express and formal words, assumed to abrogate "all rights and privileges belonging to the ancient sees in the realm of England,"* no matter by whom these rights have been conferred, or by what authority they are held. Now many of these sees hold their immunities and privileges by immemorial usage, by legal prescription, a title recognised by the law of England, and incapable of being set aside except by a power competent to abrogate the law itself; others were created under an express Act of Parliament at the time of the Reformation;† and others, at a still more recent period have been erected by Act of Parliament, one in the reign of her present Majesty.‡ That any power temporal or spiritual, foreign or domestic, should assume the right of declaring the privileges thus conferred to be abolished, repealed, and made void—(and this is what Pio Nono has done in his Letters Apostolical)—is an act of the grossest and most audacious insult. If the Pope's act were not itself a nullity, it would set him and his advisers, whoever they may be, above the laws and liberties of the British Empire. It would reduce us all to the condition of his serfs: holding our civil and religious rights, our properties, and our very lives, if he thought fit to claim them, at his mere will and pleasure. The people of this empire hurled from his throne a bigotted and besotted despot, who attempted to do, in fact, what the present Bishop of Rome impotently pretends to do in words; and they justly think it "foul scorn" of any foreign potentate to assume such a prerogative.

But here I do not wish to be misunderstood. I am no friend to those Acts of Parliament which the Pope has assumed the power of setting aside. As a Dissenter, I object to the power of the crown to confer ecclesiastical dignities, privileges, or emoluments. In my mind, it is not consistent with the rights and liberties of a Christian Church that either the Pope or Queen should exercise a supremacy over it, or in it—should nominate its officers, should enact laws for its government, should enforce these laws whether by pains and penalties, or by immunities and rewards. I am grateful for the tolerant spirit of our con-

* See the *Letters Apostolical*, "under the seal of the Fisherman," bearing date, 29th September, 1850.

† 3 K. Henry VIII. c. 9.

‡ 10 & 11 Victoria, c. 108.

stitution which indulges me in my non-conformity to the discipline, doctrine, and worship of the Established Church. But were this toleration withheld, I should not the less reprobate the attempt of any foreign state to rectify, by a usurped authority, the wrong done by the legislature of my own. If that case should ever again arise, I am persuaded the Nonconformists of this empire, like their ancestors in perilous and persecuting times, would choose rather to endure the penalties inflicted by the law on the conscientious profession of their faith, than to invoke the fatal assistance of any dispensing power, at home or abroad. The exercise of such a power is *tyranny*—authority limited by no law, responsible to none; and therefore extending to all the excesses to which pride, passion, or self-aggrandizement may prompt.

Another matter in which Pio Nono and his admirers have shown contempt for public feeling in these countries, is the commission given to the newly-appointed Bishops to govern* extensive districts within the realm of England. I believe in my heart that there was no intention to confer upon these men any right to interfere with the civil government of the districts subjected to their authority. I believe the rule which they are delegated to exercise is of a spiritual or rather of an ecclesiastical nature. But Dr. Ullathorne, one of the Pope's advisers on this occasion, has admitted that the measure recently announced has been long under consideration; the same is stated by Dr. Wiseman in his "Appeal." The document itself bears witness to the fact. We are told it has undergone various revisions and corrections:—no inadvertence can be pleaded in excuse for its language; nor is any such plea advanced. It is therefore conceded by the Pope's advocates, that he has deliberately employed this phrase, without any expressed limitation or modification, although his counsellors must have known how offensive it would prove to the minds of Englishmen. If they did not know this, they were unfit to be counsellors to a parish beadle. They must have known that it would recall to the minds of many, in these countries, the time when his predecessors claimed England as a fief of the See of Rome, and when the cowardly and guilty being who sat upon the throne was base enough to do homage to the Pope's legate for his crown; the times when Popes literally put their feet upon the necks of emperors; the times when Popes granted Christian kingdoms to sovereigns who engaged to increase the power and augment in them the revenues of Rome; the time when Popes took upon

* "So that.....we *govern, and shall continue to govern*, the counties of Middlesex, Hertford, and Essex, as Ordinary thereof; and those of Surrey, Sussex, Kent, Berkshire, &c. &c., as Administrator, with ordinary jurisdiction." —*Dr. Wiseman's Pastoral.*

them to divide among their vassals the vast regions of the New World, then imperfectly discovered, as well as the wide empires of India and the East; the times when the Bull *Regnans in Excelsis* was expedited, asserting the Pontiff's right of sovereignty over "all nations and kingdoms," actually deposing the then reigning monarch of England, and releasing all subjects of the crown from their oaths of allegiance.* As if the language of the *Motu Proprio* was not sufficiently alarming, it was followed up by a "Pastoral Epistle" of Dr. Wiseman, expedited through "the Flaminian Gate," which, if it live to future times, will be regarded as a curious proof how much vain-glory, bad taste, and bombast can make its way through that ancient outlet of "the Eternal City."

But do not suppose for one moment that I mean to accuse Pio Nono of designing to enforce these ancient pretensions of the Roman See. No; foolish as he has shown himself to be—ill-advised, as he has been, ever since the commencement of his pontificate—(and he must by this time be fully aware that never was man worse advised)—I do not think him, nor his counsellors, foolish enough once to dream of such a thing as within the limits of possibility. Whether he *wishes* for it or not, I neither affirm nor deny; he knows that it is beyond his power and even beyond his hopes. The more absurd, therefore, to keep up a form of words which, in effect, claims this prerogative. Govern England, indeed! and by a batch of Catholic priests! Let him try to govern Rome! Let him try, *for one month*, without the aid of foreign bayonets, to govern those subjects to whom he promised liberty, but whose gallant sons, for claiming the performance of that promise, he has slaughtered; and whose wives and daughters, many of them by birth and education, the noblest ladies of Rome, because they tended in the hospitals their friends and brothers, wounded by the invaders whom he hunted upon them, he has slandered in his proclamation as *prostitutes!* Govern England, indeed! Oh, Pio Nono, govern thine own presumptuous heart, and govern thy railing tongue!

The conduct of the Pope in these transactions, has been pronounced by an eminent statesman to be "*insolent and insidious*." These are the expressions in Lord John Russell's letter to the Bishop of Durham. That it has been "insolent," does not, in my mind, admit of question. The thing, if advisable for the purposes of the Roman Catholic Church, could, with perfect ease, have been done in such a manner as to give no offence, and to create no ill feeling. Had the same wisdom and moderation which dictated Dr. Wiseman's Appeal, and Dr. Ulla-

* See the Bull itself in Camden's *Elizabetha*, p. 179.

thorne's Letter of the 22d October, presided at the composition of the *Letters Apostolical* and the *Pastorals*, no offence could have been taken. But the thing has been studiously done so as to provoke, to outrage, and to insult; the very language best calculated to awaken the resentment of the whole nation, has been employed, as if on purpose. This is insolent. That the Pope's conduct merits this epithet, has been virtually conceded (not, indeed, in express words, but by implication and in effect), by several Roman Catholics of the most elevated rank, and of undoubted attachment to their religion. If no such admission had been made, the fact speaks for itself. But I cannot see that the epithet "*insidious*" is properly applied.

Insidious is a term which asserts the existence of danger—great and alarming, though not immediate danger—danger the greater and the more alarming, because it is concealed, kept out of view, hidden from the sight of those whom it is destined to overtake. This, at least, is what I understand by the term *insidious;* and of conduct deserving this epithet, I must do Pio Nono the justice to say he is not guilty. So far as the re-establishment of the Romish hierarchy is concerned, and so far as his pretensions can be looked upon as a source of danger, the Pope has been sufficiently explicit. No words could express his intentions more plainly. If there *be danger*, it is one with which we are openly threatened; the origin, means, and end of which are distinctly avowed. But I object to the term insidious on another ground; for it seems to me that *no danger whatever* can arise to any institution for which a Protestant or a British citizen need feel the least anxiety, from the measures adopted by the Pope. If there be danger to Protestantism, if there be danger to the Established Church—and I am not going to affirm that the position of either is such as releases its friends from anxiety—the danger arises from another source. Need I point out the source from which it springs? The foe to be dreaded is the foe within the camp, the men who garrison the fortress of Protestantism, but whose affections and principles are with the enemy; not the *Roman Catholics*, but the *Popish Protestants*—those that are with us, but not of us; whose bodies are with us, but whose hearts are against us; who dare not assault the positions maintained by the opponents of Protestantism, lest they beat down the very ramparts behind which they would gladly find themselves ensconced, or tear down the banner under which they would willingly do battle. Who these Popish Protestants are, I may hereafter more distinctly point out; meantime, let me remind you, that Lord John Russell has asserted the existence of such, and has indicated one section of the treacherous band—the so-called Puseyite clergy and laity of the Church of England. I agree with his

lordship that these are the men, who, *by playing at Popery in the public services of the Church of England*, and introducing as many as they durst of the distinguishing usages and doctrines of the Church of Rome—have probably invited the inroads of the Roman see—have prepared the way for the efforts of the Romish missionaries, and have occasioned all the danger that really threatens the Protestant principle in the Church of England. The fondness which so many Protestants have shown for the peculiar ceremonies, and the sacerdotal claims, the unreasonable doctrines, and the repressive spirit hitherto supposed to belong to Romanism, is the gale that is driving the Anglican Church among the breakers. Pio Nono, and the Archbishop of Westminster, and the Bishop of Birmingham, are but the weathercocks which tell in what direction the wind blows. Such at least is my opinion. Such is also Lord John Russell's opinion, as distinctly stated in his letter, and as manifested in the measure which he has lately introduced into Parliament.

If there were danger from the measures of the Pope, it would of course, have been the duty of the advisers of the crown to meet that danger and repel it. The danger surely does not arise from the mere *names* which the newly-appointed prelates may be called by among the Roman Catholics at home or abroad. As "the rose by any other name would smell as sweet," so the Romish hierarchy, under any other titles, would be equally offensive to Protestant olfactories. The danger arises from their presence in the country; from the functions which they discharge; from the *eclat* which will accompany them; from the encouragement and countenance which they have given, and will give to the members of the Roman Catholic body; from the discipline which they exercise over them; and from the influence which they may possibly gain over the general body of the English people. These are the means by which alone a Romish hierarchy can be dangerous to the Protestant religion in England. But the Bill at present before Parliament, does not intermeddle with any of these things. After it has passed, as before, the Roman Catholic prelates will continue to reside in England; they will be unmolested by law, and I sincerely hope and trust, *altogether unmolested* in the discharge of their episcopal functions; they will be at full liberty to hold as they do now, visitations, confirmations, ordinations; to consecrate chapels and cemeteries, bells and bishops; to adjudicate on questions of heresy, simony, &c. arising among their own people; to issue dispensations, censures, and excommunications, and to recall them when they see fit. Nay, it appears they are to be at full liberty to assemble in synods after the fashion of that at Thurles, if they please; and to solicit, if they are so minded, the Bishop of Rome to sanction their ban, and to lay his own

upon institutions founded by the Imperial Parliament for the general good of all the subjects of this realm. What then does the bill propose to do? To visit any of these new bishops with a fine of £100 if he can be proved to have called himself by the *local title* conferred in the *Motu Proprio*, and to prevent him from taking lands or money that may be granted to him under that title. The bill does not hinder any one else to call Dr. Wiseman Archbishop of Westminster; it only makes it penal in *him* to assume the title to himself. It does not prevent him from accepting an estate of 100,000 acres to-morrow, if any person, having legal right, should bequeath it to him in his own name, or by any name or title, except that of Archbishop of Westminster. In short, the bill applies to the new sees in England—what has been with regard to twenty-six of the existing sees—the law for twenty years in Ireland; a law which it has been found totally impossible to enforce; a law which has been habitually violated by all sorts of persons; by Catholics, by Protestants, by laymen, by clergymen, even by the officers of the government themselves, in the Orders issued for the *private entrée* to her Majesty's levee, as published to the world in the official record, the Dublin Gazette. In that document, it was announced, by *mistake*, (but the mistake could not have occurred if the Act had not been habitually violated both by Catholics and Protestants), that her Majesty had granted the privilege of the *entrée* to "the Roman Catholic Archbishop of Dublin." Here was an open infringement of the law; but not being committed by Dr. Murray himself, no person is indictable, no person can be punished for it. Dr. Murray, in his recent Pastoral, mistakes or misrepresents the fact, when he intimates that he and his episcopal brethren in Ireland, would be laid by this bill under any new restriction as to the use of the titles which they have hitherto borne. They have all along been illegal, and they have all along been used; nor has it been found possible ever to inflict the penalty. Of course, the late government were perfectly aware that the case will be exactly similar under the new Act, if it passes in its present form. It will be inoperative, for its nature is such that it cannot be enforced. It affords, therefore, no safeguard against danger to be apprehended from the Romish hierarchy; it simply retorts upon the advisers of Pio Nono and himself the insult which they have dared to hurl at the Queen, Lords, and Commons of the British empire; and this, I presume, is all the effect that ever was hoped or desired from its enactment. The inefficiency of this bill as a working measure, was to me its great recommendation; or to speak more correctly, that which mitigated the regret I could not but feel at the prospect of its passing into a law. I do not feel that it is consistent

with the dignity of our Legislature, or with the spirit of our religion, to pass a law for the mere purpose of insult—even when the insult has been provoked, as I admit this has been: and therefore, I for one, regret, and have always regretted the introduction of this bill, and shall most cordially rejoice, if political complications shall cause it to be laid aside or rejected. But seeing that it has been introduced, and may perhaps be carried through parliament, (though this is now problematical), I am glad to find it has been brought forward in such a shape that it cannot be executed. Were it a measure that created any real grievance, that debarred the Roman Catholics of any part of their religious liberties, that interfered with the exercise of their church discipline or worship, it would excite permanent irritation; it would open up *a new Catholic question* with all its heats, animosities, and agitations; it would array the citizens of the empire in two conflicting parties, whose contests might perhaps last for another half century, embittering all the relations of public and even of social life. I sincerely hope this measure will be settled one way or other, before the time comes round for a general election. A parliament chosen under the influence of a *No Popery* cry, would, I fear, undo much of the good that has been done by the legislation of the last ten years.

Before leaving this topic, I must repeat that the bill now before parliament is perfectly consistent with its noble author's first declaration upon the subject. He has been accused of inconsistency between his letter and his bill. There is, I think, an inconsistency between them; but not in reference to the Catholic part of the subject. In his letter to the Bishop of Durham he stated, that "his alarm was by no means equal to his indignation;" and accordingly, he brought in a bill founded on the principle of *retaliation for insult*, not of *precaution against danger*. Had Lord John Russell been desirous of guarding against danger, he would have directed his efforts against the greatest danger with which the church of England, or rather the Protestant element of that church, and the Protestant portion of its members, are threatened. Let me recall his own memorable words:—

"There is a danger which alarms me much more than any aggression of a foreign sovereign.

"Clergymen of our own church, who have subscribed the Thirty-nine Articles, and acknowledged in explicit terms the Queen's supremacy, have been the most forward in leading their flocks, 'step by step, to the very verge of the precipice.' The honour paid to saints, the claim of infallibility for the church, the superstitious use of the sign of the cross, the muttering of the Liturgy so as to disguise the language in which it is written, the recommendation of auricular confession,

and the administration of penance and absolution—all these these things are pointed out by clergymen of the Church of England as worthy of adoption, and are NOW openly reprehended by the *Bishop of London*, in his charge to the clergy of his diocese.

"What then is the danger to be apprehended from a foreign prince of no great power, compared to the danger within the gates, from the unworthy sons of the Church of England herself?"

When first I read these memorable words, I fully expected that Lord John Russell would propose a bill to Parliament for repealing those portions of the services of the Church of England which not only countenance, *but expressly enjoin*, some of those practices which he thus denounces. I thought he must have made up his mind to introduce a law for abolishing the days which are required by the Book of Common Prayer to be kept and observed as holydays, in commemoration and honour of "Our Lady" and certain saints; for repealing that part of the Twentieth Article, which declares that "the church hath power to decree rites and ceremonies, and *authority in controversies of faith;*" for expunging that portion of the baptismal service which *compels* the clergy, "*superstitiously*," *as most of themselves believe*, to sign the infant with *the sign of the cross;* for doing away with that part of the communion service, in which the minister is *required to exhort* any of the hearers, whose conscience is troubled, to come to himself or some other minister, *and open his grief*, "that he may *receive the benefit of absolution;*" for abrogating the 113th canon of 1603, which declares it to be "*nefas*," a heinous guilt in a clergyman to reveal matters made known to him in private confession, unless the crime confessed be capital by the laws of England; as also the canons imposing "*penances*" on certain crimes, and allowing the same to be *commuted for money;* together with the *absolution, after special confession*, to which the sick person is to be "moved," in the form for the Visitation of the Sick. I have no doubt his lordship would have been very glad to introduce a bill for these objects; but, alas! he feels that the anti-protestant party in the church of England is too powerful to be meddled with. Some of the clergy of the diocese of Oxford, when they met under the presidency of their diocesan to address the Queen upon the "papal aggression," were very desirous of having some reference to the matters of which Lord John Russell speaks introduced into their address; but the bishop declared that anything of that sort, any reference to Puseyism, would disturb their harmony, and render co-operation impossible; and so *the thing w s quashed*. The laity of the archdiocese of Canterbury appealed to their diocesan to endeavour to carry some amendment of the

law which would remove from their liturgy those portions on which the Romanizing clergy relied as sanctioning their popish usages; but his Grace replied that the recent occurrences had removed the prospect of a reform in the Book of Common Prayer "to a greater distance than ever!" That is, I suppose, has sent it somewhere beyond the orbit of the new planet, Neptune, for it never was much nearer: and he adds, by way of consolation, that they must be well aware that the things of which they complain had *always* been matter of regret to pious and conscientious members of the church. Most persons would think this a very strong, if not a sufficient, reason for altering these things; but the case appears quite different to an archiepiscopal understanding.

We see from this that the government and the bishops are far more concerned for what may be called the unity of the church than for its purity. Be the Puseyites right or be they wrong, they are not to be interfered with. Be their doctrines favourable to Popery or Protestantism, they shall not be placed under any disadvantage in the church of England. The danger which "alarms" Lord John Russell "much more than any aggression of a foreign sovereign," is that proceeding from a party in the church itself; but that party is too powerful to be disturbed. The only measure which is proposed to meet the emergency is one of which the Puseyite bishops and clergy will most cordially approve; since it merely enacts that the Right Rev. Charles James Blomfield, and not the Most Rev. Nicholas Wiseman, is the person who shall have, by law, a right to denounce the other, and us, as schismatics: a right by law to ignore the existence of all churches but his own. This will please the Anglo-Catholics, and no doubt irritate the Roman Catholics; but what *real good* it will effect remains to be seen.

Churches are very fond of "ignoring" each other, and very angry to find themselves "ignored:" but for my part, I should think ignoring is a very small matter indeed, compared with some of the things that they are in the habit of saying of each other. To ignore is simply to know nothing about a thing: to take no cognisance of it; but it has unfortunately happened that all the great churches of Christendom not only ignore each other at times, but at other times take notice of each other's doctrine and worship in a manner that is anything but complimentary. To begin with the ignoring:—the church of Rome stands up plainly before all men's sight and says, "There is just one holy, apostolic, universal church of Christ in the world, and that is—MYSELF!" So, of course, she knows nothing of any other church; for she is a church herself, and there is but one. The church of England, in her 10th canon of 1603,

declares, that "whosoever shall hereafter affirm that those ministers who refuse to subscribe the form and manner of divine worship prescribed in the Book of Common Prayer, and their followers, may take to themselves the name and title of *another church, different from that established by law*, are to be excommunicated *ipso facto*, and not to be absolved until they repent and publicly recant these impious errors:" and in the Book of Irish canons there is one denouncing the same penalty on any or all who shall presume to say that there is in Ireland "any other church," or any body of persons who may rightly take to themselves the name and title of a church, other than the church by law established. This ignores all churches, Protestant and Catholic alike, except herself. But ignoring is not the worst.

The Church of Rome, through the Council of Trent, repeatedly declares that she is taught by the Apostles, instructed by Christ, and from time to time enlightened by the Holy Spirit, so as to perceive all divine truth infallibly and declare it to the world as occasion may require; and accordingly she has laid down her definitions in terms express and plain, inculcating a whole body of doctrine, on almost every point at issue between herself and the Protestant Churches of the 16th century:—on the *Mass, Transubstantiation, Confession, Penance, Absolution, Indulgence, Purgatory*, the *Invocation of the Virgin Mary, Angels, and Saints*, the *Adoration of Reliques, Images, and Pictures*, and a vast number of other things; and at the end of every decree, she declares that if any presume to dissent from what she asserts, he is "ANATHEMA!" The Church of England, in her XXXIX. Articles, declares the Romish doctrine, concerning *Purgatory, Pardons, Worshipping*, and *Adoration*, as well *of Images as of Reliques*, and also the *Invocation of Saints*, to be a "*fond thing, vainly invented, grounded upon no warranty of Scripture;* but rather *repugnant to the Word of God;*" and asserts the "*Sacrifices of Masses*, in which it was commonly said that the Priest did offer Christ for the quick and the dead, to have remission of pain or guilt, were BLASPHEMOUS FABLES and DANGEROUS DECEITS." The Church of Scotland, in her Confession of Faith, declares the Visible Church to consist of all those "that profess *the true religion*," that is, doubtless, *her own;* and says that out of it "there is no ordinary possibility of Salvation." As to the Pope, she declares him to be "THAT ANTICHRIST, THAT MAN OF SIN AND SON OF PERDITION, that exalteth himself in the Church against Christ, and all that is called God." And in her National Covenant, the subscribers to that document declare that they "*abhor and detest all kinds of Papistry, in general and particular heads*, even as they are now damned and confuted by the Word of God and the Kirk

of Scotland:" which accordingly are enumerated and are successively denounced as "vain," "erroneous," "false," "usurping," "tyrannical," "cruel," "bloody," "worldly," "wicked," "superstitious," "profane," and "blasphemous." The Churches of England and Rome both retain—the former in the Book of Common Prayer, the latter in the Breviary—the Creed of St. Athanasius, as it is called, which denies the possibility of salvation to any one who does not think of the Trinity exactly as the author of that curious formulary believed. When one hears of these things, one cannot help thinking it were better to be "*ignored*" than noticed thus. When churches thus anathematize each other, and mutually pronounce each other's doctrines false, blasphemous, and damnable, a pious and charitable man is disposed to act as a worthy old gentleman once did, when he heard two young men, heated with passion, venting their fury against each other in oaths and curses. After keeping silence for a time, in hopes that they would see their folly and sin, and desist, the old man at length took off his hat, and meekly addressing the disputants, said in a tone of gentleness and solemnity, "May God Almighty bless you both!" The reproof is said to have been effectual; but I greatly fear the most earnest prayers for unity and peace would fail to induce the churches of Christendom to desist from denouncing and anathematizing each other. I have such confidence in the moderation which has for many years been on the increase, that I am convinced if these denunciations were now for the first time proposed, no church would adopt them; but having come down from antiquity, being enshrined in their creeds, and sanctified by association with many religious experiences, being solemnly subscribed by their clergy and dignitaries, it is hard to get any church to give them up. In matters of this kind, Protestant churches, though professing themselves liable to mistakes, are almost as difficult to change as the Church of Rome, whose members profess to think her decisions infallible, and therefore unalterable. They confess they are liable to mistakes; but at the same time they will tell you that you will infallibly be damned if you do not think as they do. What inconsistency! A glorious future awaits that Church, be it Catholic or Protestant, Episcopalian or Presbyterian, or by whatever other name denominated, which shall set to others the example of discontinuing these damnatory creeds; and shall at once, frankly and openly recognize the great truth, that Man is not to be saved or damned for his opinion upon disputed points; that simple mental error is not a sin; that men will be judged at the bar of God, not by their success in finding the truth, but for the earnestness with which they have sought it, the sincerity to God and man with which they have professed what appeared to their own

consciences to be God's truth, and the persevering piety, humility, and charity, with which they have tried to carry it out in their inward and outward life. So long as the contrary notion retains its hold upon the minds of men, suspicion and alienation, bigotry and intolerance, have a stronghold in their hearts, from which it is not easy to dislodge them; and thus the peace of the church itself is disturbed, the harmony of communities is broken, and the advancement of our race in happiness, virtue, and the refinements of civilized life is powerfully impeded.

My friends, if I touch upon a topic that has been more than once brought before your minds in the course of these Lectures, impute it to my deep conviction of the importance of the subject; and to my desire to show that among those discrepancies which you will have observed upon other points—for we think for ourselves, and do not profess to think alike—there is a full and hearty agreement upon this; for we are all true Protestants.

This making of man's salvation to depend on right opinion, not upon holy living, is one of the grand corruptions of the religion of Jesus Christ. The notion that men are to be judged before God according to their faith, not according to their works, is directly in the teeth of several solemn declarations of our blessed Saviour and his inspired Apostles, and is therefore irreconcilable with the grand principle of Protestantism, which is the sufficiency of Holy Scripture: or as it has been expressed by the immortal William Chillingworth—"The Bible, and the Bible *only* is the religion of Protestants!" The notion that men who "stick to sound believing," will be saved hereafter, and that men who deviate from orthodoxy of religious opinion will be damned, is the plague-spot which has infected the Reformed Churches; the canker-worm which has gnawed into the vitals of the Reformation itself; the fatal barrier which has prevented the farther purification of churches calling themselves reformed; the insurmountable obstacle which has stood in the way of the farther progress of the principle of Reformation without. If we take the year of the death of Luther (now three hundred years ago), as our point of comparison with the present times, and survey the map of Europe, as it was then and is now portioned out between the adherents and the antagonists of Rome, we shall find that with a few trifling exceptions, as the two parties stood then, so stand they now. The
30 Reformation after putting forth in ~~three hundred~~ years an energy such as no principle of religion ever manifested before or since, suddenly became stationary. In three hundred years it has not really advanced one inch. Why was this? Because the principle of finality was adopted. The Reformation became then the antagonist of Reform; because its champions laid down

the doctrine that men were to be damned for departing from the right creed; that they had got the right creed *already;* and that exclusion here and hell hereafter were the portion of those who did not come up to their standard of believing. The moment the so-called Reformers put forth this principle, all Reformation stopped, as if by magic. The men in Roman Catholic countries, who groaned under the yoke of spiritual oppression, whose souls sighed for liberty, for liberty of conscience, freedom to worship God, freedom to think of him as his own word commanded, and to serve him as his own word enjoined—saw then that the churches of the Reformation offered to them no asylum; and as liberty was denied in each communion, they kept their doubts, their scruples and their disbelief to themselves: rather adhering to the church in which they had been reared, than revolt to others in which they must adopt a new form of implicit faith and blind submission to authority: or perhaps be induced by the fear of punishment to become members of what to them would be "an organized hypocrisy." As long as the Reformers could utter to the world the glorious tidings "the truth shall make you free!" not only the common people, but all classes, priests and laymen, princes and peasants, heard them gladly. From the moment when they began to bind themselves and their adherents in the spiritual fetters of damnatory creeds, their occupation as Reformers was gone, and their success was at an end.

This dreadful notion has lain at the foot of much of the intolerance which has disgraced the Reformation Churches: *much* of it, *not all* of it; for sometimes persecution has been owing to the mere selfishness, vain-glory, ambition, or avarice of individual men—priests or laymen;* but *much* of this intolerance, all of it that was really conscientious, and therefore all that was a cause of permanent danger to free inquirers, has been caused by the ingrained notion fixed in men's minds, that sound belief is needful to the enjoyment of God's love and mercy. If God hates a heretic, am I bound to love him? Am I not bound to be like God? to act as like God as I can? to love what he loves, and hate whom he hates? I have no doubt the case has presented itself to the mind of many a persecutor from this point of view: and that such reflections have silenced the voice of natural pity, and have hardened the heart into steel, against the cry for compassion. It has been felt to be the most solemn of all duties to cut off from the means of perverting others, those whose talents and virtues, combined with an erroneous belief, would have probably rendered them the instruments of

* As in the case of Franciscus Davidides, persecuted to the death, by the Prince of Transylvania, at the instance of Blandrata, a physician who soon after relapsed into Romanism.

seducing the babes of Christ into the paths of error and ruin. Need I remind you of the crimes into which the churches of the Reformation were seduced by these specious pretences, in Germany, in Switzerland, in Holland, in England—aye, and in Ireland too; for in Ireland there have been confessors; though no martyrs are emblazoned on her diptychs: except, and I grieve to say it, martyrs made by Protestant hands. Need I remind you of the barbarous and inhuman tortures that were employed upon the puritans of England and Scotland, by the adherents of the Episcopal Protestant Reformed Church, in its palmy days of prosperity? Need I remind you of the inhuman and atrocious law which was carried in the Presbyterian Parliament of England, against the same Episcopalians, when the chances of war had thrown them prostrate before their antagonists? There is one case, however, out of many, which circumstances induce me to select: I take it from Scottish history. On the 23rd of December, 1696, a student at Edinburgh, named Thomas Aikenhead, was tried before the Court of Justiciary, and found guilty of blasphemy, under an Act of the Scottish Parliament, passed in the first Parliament of King William, which ordains that "whoever in writing a discourse, shall deny, or impugn, or quarrel, or argue, or reason against the Being of a God, or any of the Persons of the blessed Trinity —shall, for the first offence, be punished with imprisonment till he makes a public recantation of his offence, clothed in sackcloth: for the second offence be imprisoned and fined: and for the third be punished with death as an obstinate blasphemer:" and under an earlier Act, passed in the year 1661, which enacts that "whosoever, not being distracted in his wits, shall rail upon or curse God, or any of the persons of the blessed Trinity, shall be punished with death." All the witnesses against Mr. Aikenhead, were his fellow-students, who repeated conversations which had passed between them and him. The prisoner had read several sceptical works, and had mentioned to the witnesses the arguments which he found in them; but, as he solemnly asserted, for no other purpose than for that of learning the proper answer to the arguments which he found in these books. The principal witness against Mr. Aikenhead was a young man named Mungo Craig, who had supplied him with several sceptical works, and had talked at least as freely as Aikenhead himself. The prisoner was not allowed any counsel, nor permitted to plead for himself: otherwise he could not have been found guilty; for his crime did not come under the statute of 1661, inasmuch as he had neither "cursed nor railed against any of the persons of the Trinity;" neither did it come under the capital part of that of 1688, inasmuch as it was his first offence; at least his first arraignment. But he was found guilty notwith-

standing, and sentenced to be hanged: nor could he even obtain a day's reprieve although he solemnly recanted the offence imputed to him, and earnestly besought the court that, as it was a first offence, and in consideration of his youth, mercy might be extended to him, or at least time for repentance granted. He was executed on the 16th of January, 1697. There is extant a letter from Mr. Anstruther, an eminent advocate of the time, dated the 26th of January, 1697 in which he says that "Mr. Aikenhead *was eighteen years of age, not vicious, and extremely studious.* I went to him in prison. I found a work on his spirit: he wept that ever he should have maintained such tenets, and desired a short reprieve, for his eternal state depended on it. I pleaded for him in the council, and brought it to the chancellor's vote; but I was told it could not be granted *unless the ministers would intercede.* But the ministers out of a pious (though as I think ignorant) zeal, *spoke and preached for cutting him off.* I do think he would have proved an eminent Christian had he lived. I am not for consulting the church in state affairs. Our ministers are generally of a narrow set of thoughts, and confined principles, and not able to bear things of this nature."* Such was the merciless spirit of these Presbyterian ministers of Edinburgh, who but a few years before had been themselves liable to be hunted down like tigers or hyenas by Episcopalian persecutors. They had suffered persecution without learning pity. I have selected this example, not because I believe the church of Scotland to have been more addicted to such atrocities than other churches holding the doctrine that salvation depends on sound belief, but because some ill-informed persons have not hesitated to deny that Scottish Presbyterianism ever imbued her hands in the blood of heretics. Those who assert this may know many things, but they have yet to learn Church history. The Presbyterian ministers of Edinburgh at that day revered the memories of Calvin and Beza: they held their principles and emulated their burning zeal. They believed their own confession of faith, and they acted upon its persecuting principles. And it is well known that in thousands of cases, in which persecution has not hunted its victims to a bloody death, it has subjected them to *minor* penalties: *minor—that is, in appearance;* and so not calculated to call forth public sympathy and arouse the public indignation; but most grievous in effect; long continued imprisonments in such prisons too, as public opinion would not now permit to be employed for one week, even for the confinement of pickpockets and highwaymen; forfeiture of property; transportation, at a time when transportation meant being sold to slavery; in short, the severance of the dearest

* There is a full account of Aikenhead's case in Cobbett's State Trials.

ties, and the temporal ruin not merely of the heretics themselves, but of their wives and families. The barbarous penal code of Ireland is an example, now, thanks be to God, only remembered as matter of dismal history! These are some of the results of holding a damnatory creed. Where it is held in earnest (a mere outward subscription or assent is nothing), it dries up the springs of charity, and turns its adherents into relentless persecutors.

Again. The same unhappy principle has embittered religious controversy. When two disputants come together, imbued with the fatal idea that they can be only saved by orthodoxy, and each convinced that the doctrine held by the other is certain, if it spreads, and as far as it spreads, to consign souls to perdition, they do not commence discussion with a desire to find out and embrace what may be true in their opponent's views, to detect and abandon what may be erroneous in their own. Each looks upon the other, not as a friend and helper in this grand inquiry after truth, but as an enemy to God and man; a limb of antichrist—an ally and instrument of Satan. They begin, not "with a *little* aversion," but with a great deal; and they usually find that it increases vastly upon a further acquaintance. Hence, words of scorn and contumely, words of wrath poured out from "hearts of controversy," invective instead of proof, Billingsgate instead of argument; so that the *odium theologicum* has passed into a proverb. It was so of old, and many now present can remember scenes and occasions, when the theological hatred of the present day, thus engendered, has proved the legitimacy of its descent by its resemblance to the old stock.

But worst of all, these damnatory creeds, this notion that a man will be damned for not thinking right on certain points, have deprived the churches of the Reformation which are so persuaded, of that liberty "wherewith Christ hath made them free;" that liberty for which the Reformers *thought* that they were contending; the liberty of free inquiry after religious truth; the right of exercising their private judgment upon all that concerns their own eternal salvation; the right of bringing every doctrine and every enactment of the church itself, or any of its members, to the touchstone of sacred scripture, there to be tested and proved whether it be pure gold from the celestial mintage, or worthless dross of man's base coining. This liberty, this glorious liberty, every man who enters a creed-bound church must *virtually* abandon; for he knows that if he inquires, however humbly, prayerfully, earnestly, and perseveringly to find the mind and will of God revealed for his salvation, and if his inquiries guide him to conclusions at variance with what his church holds to be essential doctrines, he must

either leave her, or remain within her as a hypocrite. What wonder that few, even of ministers, are found to engage earnestly and perseveringly in the study of religion! "Mr. Whiston," said an eminent prelate to that learned and pious man, "Mr. Whiston, I dare not inquire, for if you should happen to be in the right, the Church hath been in error for 1300 years." The Right Rev. Dr. Blomfield who now, at the eleventh hour (and feebly enough even now), raises his voice against the Romanizing tendencies of so many in his own church, is the same bishop of London who, in his primary Visitation Charge, declared that, to be a true Christian, a man must begin with "*a total prostration of the understanding.*" What more would my respected friend, Dr. Denvir, ask of me, if his object were to bring me into the Roman Catholic church, over which he presides in this diocese? I admit that few creeds embrace all possible points of theology; some of them leave more, and some fewer, of questions on which they pronounce no decision. On these, therefore, inquiry is still open. But, from the nature of the case, these can only be points of little or no importance. All the "essential doctrines," all the fundamentals, all those on which salvation hinges, or is supposed to hinge, are laid down in the creeds too plainly to be controverted. Upon them there can be no farther scrutiny. To deny or doubt them is heresy, and the penalty is exclusion here and misery hereafter. The liberty of free inquiry enjoyed by the members of churches so situated, is very like the freedom of the press as it existed in Madrid fifty years ago. "There is," says a certain writer, "there is established at Madrid a perfect free trade in all productions, which extends even to that of the press; so that, provided a man in his writings speaks neither of the authorities, nor of religion, nor of politics, nor of morals, nor of people in place, nor of societies of credit, nor of the opera, nor of the other theatres, nor of any body who is any body, he may print everything he pleases, freely, under the inspection of two or three censors!"* So the theologians of the creed-bound church may be indulged with permission to canvass a petty incident of church history, or to criticise a text or two (though even here they had better be careful); but if they once meddle, directly or indirectly, with the *man-made fundamentals*, they are soon taught to know and feel that they are got to the end of their line, or beyond their permitted boundary. If they are not punished—and some such men have lived and written without punishment—it has been from some personal or temporary consideration, which made it inconvenient to proceed against them. The result of these things is,

* *Mariage de Figaro.* Act v. scene 3.

that there grows up in such churches a constant fear and dread of free inquiry; a terror of deviating from the magic circle of fundamentals prescribed in the creed; an overweening value for the creeds themselves; a superstitious deference for the authority of their authors, or those whose opinions were used as a guide in framing them; which put a stop to the exercise of the mind upon the most solemn of all subjects, in the case of all who cannot come up unhesitatingly to the prescribed standard, and renders the communions thus enchained as much the slaves of authority as those which at once submit to the yoke of Rome. Nay, where a written creed is employed, more so; for the Church of Rome has a living judge, a man, a body of men—a priest or a Pope, a conclave or a council, who are in the world, and, whatever they may pretend or think, cannot help moving with the world while it moves; and it moves in spite of them. But these confessions of faith are dead popes, the mere voices of the past, unchanging and unchangeable; incapable of adapting themselves to the altered circumstances of the world, and holding the vessel of the church for ever anchored in the midst of the stream.

I have trespassed long upon your attention, and my discourse has unavoidably taken in a wide range of topics; yet I have endeavoured so to construct the whole that every part might have a bearing upon the great question—What is essential to the Christian religion, to the enjoyment of its promises, its blessings, and its hopes? Is it fellowship with any particular church, as that of Rome, of Canterbury, of Geneva? Is it reception of a peculiar set of sacraments, outward acts, signs or ceremonies? Do these cleanse the soul from guilt or fit it for communion with God? Is it adherence to a set of mystical and mysterious doctrines, which the very men who define them admit to be above reason, and, therefore, unintelligible; which are not revealed by Almighty God through any of his prophets or messengers; which the bulk of mankind may profess but cannot comprehend? Is it adherence to any formula of faith other than that given by the Saviour himself to his church? Is it doctrine, faith, opinion; or is it life, soul, spirit? Is it believing, or is it loving?

The Roman Catholics and the Popish Protestants say men can be saved only through the sacraments—their sacraments, administered by their clergy, and made effectual by the gift of the holy spirit, transmitted down to their officers in unbroken succession from the Apostles.

The Calvinistic, Reformed, Evangelical Protestants, by whatever name they may call themselves, denounce this doctrine as antichristian, subversive of the efficacy of Christ's sacrifice, and affirm that men are to be saved by faith; that is,

as they generally explain it, by believing in what they hold to be the fundamental doctrines of the gospel; and so becoming entitled to partake in the merit of Christ's perfect sacrifice.

Let mere call to the minds of both the beginning and the close of Christ's sermon on the Mount. "Blessed are the poor in spirit, the mourners, the meek, the hungerers and thirsters after righteousness, the merciful, the pure in heart." "Whosoever heareth and doeth shall be likened unto a wise man who built his house upon a rock. Whosoever heareth and doeth not shall be likened unto a foolish man who built his house upon the sand." The sentence pronounced upon the good and upon the bad. "Come ye blessed of my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world: for I was hungry and ye gave me meat, I was thirsty and ye gave me drink. Inasmuch as ye did these things unto the least of these, my brethren, ye did them unto me. Depart from me ye cursed into everlasting fire: I was hungry and ye gave me no meat: inasmuch as ye did it not to one of the least of these ye did it not to me." The test of love. "He that hath my commandments and keepeth them, he it is that loveth me, and he that loveth me shall be loved of my Father, and I will love him and manifest myself to him." The retribution. "The righteous judgment of God, who will render to every man according to his deeds: to them who by patient continuance in well-doing, seek for glory, honour, and immortality, eternal life; but to them that are contentious and do not obey the truth, but obey unrighteousness, indignation, and wrath, tribulation and anguish, upon every soul of man that doeth evil; but glory, honour, and immortality to every man that worketh good."

This, in my opinion is sound doctrine: a scriptural, Protestant view of the essentials of religion, the qualifications for the enjoyment of God's favour here, the tests of fitness for the privileges of the gospel here. The church which adds to this sets up a claim to be purer more regular and more orthodox, consisting as it does of fallible and frail mortals on earth, than is the society of the blessed in heaven.

If I rightly read the gospel, it makes the essentials of religion consist in the exercise of the gentle and lovely graces of piety, meekness, humility, integrity, and mercy—in active virtues, not in speculative opinions; in the spirit of peace and brotherly love; in patient endurance of evil, calumny, and reproach; and in a temper the most averse that can be from the infliction of evil upon any one, even upon those who have done us severe and unprovoked wrong. The man who thus lives in imitation of Christ seems to me a Christian. And I bless God that these graces are not confined to any church or sect. Deeply as I am

attached to my own cherished views of religious doctrine—and the longer I live, and the more I experience their consolations, the more do I love and prize them—I dare not affirm that these blessed evidences of the work of Christ upon the soul are confined to those who think as I think: I am thankful to heaven that I know this to be untrue. Thanks be to God there is a large amount of pure and lofty virtue, existing and diffusing happiness and peace far beyond the narrow limits of my sect. Some men's lives—I say it with sorrow and shame—disgrace a good profession; and others, I allow with pleasure, do honour to what I cannot but regard as an erroneous creed. You all know that I dissent very widely from the doctrines of the Roman Catholic church: far more widely than those who are loudest in denouncing her sacraments as superstitions, her priests as apostates, and her worship as idolatry; and who make it their chief aim to insult the personal and religious feelings, and to trample upon the civil rights of the members of her communion. Yet were I called upon to select from modern history a man in whose breast the pure and gentle spirit of Christ appeared to have found its most appropriate dwelling-place, I should probably name an archbishop of that communion—Fénélon: and were I to name a society of persons in which the holy fruits of the gospel appear to have been produced in the largest measure and richest maturity, assuredly no society would occur to my mind sooner than that composed of the Nuns and Recluses of Port Royal.* There have been Protestants, and those of different churches and opposing creeds, who have been worthy to take their place beside these truly amiable and excellent persons. I am persuaded I speak the sentiments of the Catholics who hear me, when I say, that if John Howard and Elizabeth Fry had been but members of "the true church," they would have been canonized. Shall we refuse to acknowledge their Christian excellence because the one was a Baptist, the other a Quakeress? Wherever these holy effects have been produced, we have the Saviour's warrant for affirming that his gospel exists and works, for "the tree is known by its fruits:" and from my heart and soul I pity the man who is compelled, by his own prejudices or the authority of his priest or church, to declare that men and women like these were no Christians. Christians they were—the very cream of Christianity: and wretched is the condition of any church that is under the necessity of expelling, for dogmatic differences, such members from her bosom.

My brethren, in the times of the Apostle Paul there was a a man in the church at Corinth who disgraced his calling by

* See Stephen's *Essays in Ecclesiastical Biography*, Vol. I.

living in incest with his father's wife. The Apostle expelled him from the society for his crime, though he was afterwards restored on his repentance. In the same church there were several persons who denied the resurrection of the dead, but no excommunication was directed against them, no censure, no exercise of discipline. The Apostle reasoned with them; he tried to convince them that they were mistaken, and that was all. This shows the different light in which the primitive and apostolic church viewed mental error and moral delinquency. We hear of no excommunications there, except of those who had "thrust away from them a good conscience, and so made shipwreck concerning the faith." Building upon this foundation, I demand for Christians, in the words of John Locke, "*Liberty, just and true Liberty—equal and impartial Liberty*" —freedom of opinion for all, for the laity and for the clergy; for them that are without any particular church, and for them that are within; liberty to inquire after truth, to believe, to profess according to their own conscience, in the sight of God, unawed by human terrors or ecclesiastical restrictions; liberty to believe, and liberty to reject, what their brethren think; liberty to leave the church and liberty to stay in it, without let or hindrance arising out of their religious belief. I demand it in the name of Christ, who has made *love*, not *orthodoxy*, the test of discipleship. I demand it in the name of the Apostles and primitive church, who never rejected any that held to Christ as the head. I demand it in the name of the present age, whose call for intellectual liberty is not to be mistaken. I demand it in the name of our common Christianity itself, which has already lost its hold on vast multitudes of persons in every part of the civilized world, and will rapidly forfeit the allegiance of many, many more, if the system of exclusion and denunciation, and spiritual oppression be still connected with its name. For the time is fast passing away, nay, is already past, when men could be schooled or scolded, damned or dragooned into any creed, or out of it; and if these measures are persevered in—if men are taught that they must either renounce their freedom or their faith in Christ—they will take the proposers of the alternative at their word; but whatever else they may give up, they certainly will not give up their freedom. Thus will Christianity suffer; and, if it were right that a heavenly institution of love, goodness, mercy, of godlike pity and godlike holiness combined, should suffer for the errors and faults of its nominal adherents, and the perversion it has experienced at their hands—it would deserve to suffer. But it does not deserve to suffer thus, and God forbid it should!

This great work, therefore, which the friends of the gospel have now before them, is that of putting down the whole system

of intolerance, exclusion, anathematising and cursing of men, for their speculative opinions. In proportion as this work is successfully carried on, will Christianity prosper; in proportion as it fails, will Christianity decline and fall. Most sincerely do I pray that all who are concerned in this subject may take it seriously to heart. Let all that love the Lord Jesus and his faith, make a strenuous effort to unshackle the churches and their members from the degrading bondage in which they have so long been held by their exclusive and damnatory creeds.

In this blessed work, I must with sorrow confess I look for little help from the clergy. Protestant and Catholic alike, they have ever been, and I fear still are, the warmest advocates for imposing civil penalties and ecclesiastical censures on the impugners of their darling creeds. They have often, in times past, hunted on the mob to deeds of violence and crime; they have called on statesmen to decree the most horrid penalties against those whom they deemed heretics; they have appealed to the tribunals, for the honour of God, to put these bloody laws in execution; and they have impotently endeavoured to follow their victims to another world, and doomed them there to eternal flames and tortures. I fear the spirit of the clergy is not much mended. My trust is in the honest, true-hearted, and fairplay-loving laity of the United Kingdom, who I doubt not will, sooner or later—but the sooner the more effectually—say to the clergy of all denominations, "Hast thou faith? Have it to thyself before God." And I would fondly hope that something may be contributed to this end by the series of lectures which is now closed.

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